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["LADY VALERIE," CRIED REX VERRER, IN ALARM; "ARE YOU ILL?"]

THE HEIRESS OF BEAUDESERT.

CHAPTER I.

FIRST LOVE.

The Castle of Beaudesert stood in grim defiance at the top of a rock, whilst the waters of the River Wyke soothed in agitated foam-crested waves at its feet. Nature had done her best with womanly tenderness to soften every harsh outline—hanging graceful wreaths of virginian-creeper or climbing rose on the stately grey towers, and filling every crevice of the rock with soft mosses, fleshy ferns, or the roots of silvery beeches, whose delicate leaves shimmered in the summer sunshine.

It was the month of roses, and every nook in the garden was filled with glowing blossoms. Here they clung to the ground as if loath to leave the embrace of mother earth, but the next moment they were found climbing over archways, peeping in at windows, or

hanging from balconies like restless children who cannot be kept in order.

The Earl of Beaudesert was rather like the castle from which he took his name. Naturally of an earnest, grave disposition, he would have become stern and reserved as years went on if it had not been for his only child, the Lady Valerie, who was the sunshine as well as the great anxiety of his life.

When very young he had married Valerie de Favere, the daughter of a French marquis, who had given her life for her child, and died with her infant's first kiss on her lips.

The tenderness which the Earl had lavished on his beautiful wife was given in abundance to his little daughter; but being, as he was, a particularly sensible man, he was aware of the risk she ran of being spoiled, and, therefore, often affected a sternness of expression when talking to her or listening to her childish nonsense.

Consequently, as Valerie grew up, the adoration which she felt for her father was mixed with a certain amount of awe, and whilst in his presence she was wont to be silent and

abstracted, only giving reins to her naturally lively spirits when alone with her dear old governess, Miss Beck, or with some of her younger friends.

"Valerie! Valerie! where are you?" came in a feminine, squeaky voice through the shuttered windows of the room which had once been a schoolroom, but now was dignified by the name of the boudoir.

As no answer was forthcoming, a head adorned with grey curls, ranged with scrupulous neatness in front of a cap with silver-grey ribbons, was protruded through a chink of the shutters, and the cry repeated. Presently a light step was heard on the gravel; a girl's form, slim and graceful as a fawn's, appeared in the dazzling sunshine, and a handful of roses was thrown into the old lady's lap as the shutter was drawn back by an eager hand.

"Are they not beauties, you dear old Becky? I am going to wear them to-night! Nothing false or artificial shall there be about me! Other girls shall be befrilled and be-furbelowed up to their chins—"

"I'm afraid that is not the fashion," inter-

regarding her ad-vent pupil with a demure smile.

"Well, not up to their chins, perhaps, but just as far as they like, whilst I go in for sweet simplicity. Do you think I can stand it?" with a laughing glance at a mirror.

"I think if you stand there any longer in the sun you will have such a headache that, instead of simplicity in a ball-dress, you will have something still simpler in the shape of a dressing-gown."

"Not I. I wouldn't have a headache to-day for anything," stepping inside and gathering up her flowers with tender care. I must look my best, because that conceited little ape, Florey Springold, will be there, and I am sure she means to carry all before her."

"And if she should; would it matter much?" with a grave mouth and twinkling eyes.

"Yes, Becky, dear, I should cut my throat," with intense earnestness.

Taking no notice of this alarming assertion, Miss Beck quietly knitted another row of her stocking before she resumed the conversation.

"Would you care to go on as she does, flitting with every man she comes across, till there is not one who really respects her, not one who does not laugh at her behind her back?"

"They are civil enough to her face," with a scornful curl of her pretty lip.

Then she went upstairs, with the roses in her hand and a thoughtful expression in her eyes.

Slowly she walked down the gallery, where the portraits of her ancestors looked down on their fairest descendant as she passed;—and, entering a large room, beautifully furnished, closed the door behind her, and leaning out of the window, looked dreamily at the lovely prospect before her.

But Lady Valerie de Montfort saw neither the silvery leaves of the beech-covered slope nor the waters of the Wyllie twinkling like flakes of gold between the feathery branches, for she was looking into the future of her own young life, and the confidence of youth brought back the smiles to her lips.

Hitherto fortune had given her all that mortal could desire—riches, noble birth, perfect health, that treasured gift of beauty, a kind and affectionate father, everything except a mother's love.

And the day was coming when the loss of that loving protection, which appears to belong to a child of right, would make every other blessing seem worthless, and cast a shadow over the sunshine of her young life's summer. She would cry aloud for a mother's help, a mother's word of advice, but there would never be an answer to the girl's appealing cry, except from the clouds above.

Valerie was neither dark nor fair, neither tall nor short. Her hair was like an autumn wood in the midday sun, her eyes like the same, with the shadows and the lights intensified as the dark curling lashes were raised or lowered.

It was a face that won your heart at the first glance, and kept it by the charm of its truth and sweetness.

Everyone in the parish was devoted to her, from little Jim, who delighted in running out to open the side-gate in the park whenever the dark chestnut came in sight; to Mr. Winter, the white-haired rector, who had held her in his arms at the font, and read the burial-service over her lovely young mother but a few weeks afterwards.

The dogs nearly knocked her down with their boisterous welcome when her step was heard in the stables; the horses poked their heads out of their stalls and neighed an eager greeting; the deer in the park left off browsing the tenderest tufts of fern in order to be fed out of her small white hand; and every winter a crowd of hungry birds fluttered down on to the sill of the breakfast-room window to pick up the crumbs, which she never forgot to provide them with.

She was surrounded by love on every side—

love, rich and full as the sunshine of Heaven, and yet Lady Valerie de Montfort was not quite content.

A loving parent, affectionate friends, devoted servants and dependents, all this was not enough for her, as the man who, in spite of great riches in the shape of flocks and herds, coveted the poor man's one ewe-lamb; so this young heiress of Beadesert could not be quite happy whilst she was uncertain whether Florey Springold, the daughter of a neighbouring baronet, had possessed herself of the love of Rex Verreker, or whether it was one day to be laid at her own small feet.

Rex Verreker, a young diplomat, of very good birth and very poor fortune, had broken as many hearts as there are days in the year; winning them, as it were, by mistake, because of his handsome face and soft rich voice, and only throwing them away because he was obliged to, either by the exigencies of fate, or for the sake of his honour.

He came to Beadesert for a week when Lady Valerie was only sixteen years of age, and treated her with the tenderness he always showed to children. Before a few days were over her passionate young heart was lit to do what he liked with, although in the pale of her maidenhood she would have died rather than confess it; and now, on this summer's evening, when all the grand people of the county were coming to do honour to her eighteenth birthday, dukes, marquises, and earls were dressed together as in training for a fox-hunt, whilst for the sake of a commoner she was willing to divest herself of her most treasured jewels in order to please his capricious taste by an affection of simplicity.

"Make me look as nice as ever you can, Susan," she said, to her maid. "Oh, how I wish I could be perfectly, radiantly beautiful, if only for one night!"

The maid smiled—she was a simple country girl, who had not yet acquired the habit of paying compliments.

"Some people, my lady, would say you was well enough as you are."

"Some people are content with anything," with a slightly impatient sigh. "If I were only as fair as Miss Springold I could be content, too."

"And make all this beautiful hair look as if its colour had been washed out in soda," touching the silky curls which were hanging in exquisite disorder over her mistress's shoulder.

"No, make it look like real gold, such as artists love," with a dreamy smile.

Mrs. Ashton gave Mr. Verreker a better room than the Marquis, my lady; because, she says, he's a real gentleman down to the ground. And so he is," with grave conviction. "I met him coming along the corridor. 'Good evening, Susan,' he says, quite pleasantly, 'the dear old place is looking as charming as ever,' and then goes on to his room, but the Marquis," she stopped, significantly.

Valerie smiled, but asked no questions, not caring to hear any gossip about her guests.

When her toilette was ended she looked at her own reflection, and her heart bounded with delight. Her only ornament besides her roses which she had gathered with her own hand was a diamond star, which glinted with a thousand exquisite lights amongst the curls of her soft brown hair.

Susan could not suppress an exclamation of admiration, as her young mistress passed out of the room and down the long corridor, in all the glory of her innocence and beauty, on the way to meet the fate which was waiting for her on the threshold.

CHAPTER II.

HER FIRST BALL.

Two men were lounging in opposite corners of a smoking carriage in the express train to Beadesert.

One was fat, fair, short, and commonplace, with an appearance of wealth, indifferent breeding, and intense self-satisfaction about him; whilst the other differed from him, as night from day. There was something peculiarly aristocratic in the carriage of his head, and the cut of his delicately-chiselled features, but what struck a casual observer most was the expression of his eyes. Usually rather dreamy and abstracted; every now and then, when they fixed themselves on an individual who seemed to possess a particular interest for their owner, the pupils dilated to an extraordinary size, and a strange, almost unearthly radiance seemed to emanate from them.

By his own most private friends he was given the undesirable nicknames of the "Evil eye," but in ordinary life he called himself Colonel Darrell, late of the 17th Lancers.

"How high do you put the figure, Marshall?" he inquired, as he pulled another cigarette from the case in his pocket.

"Twenty thou'—not a penny less," said Lord Marshall, laconically.

"Twenty thou'—only that? I thought the good count was a millionaire and the girl an only child," in a tone of disappointment.

"Twenty thou' a-year, man! It would take the Bank of England to content you!"

"Ah, that makes a difference; but of course she's booked. Prizes like that don't fall into the hands of the first man who comes."

"Not exactly; but the old fellow wouldn't hear of any engagement until after her eighteenth birthday. To-day she's free, but I'll bet you any money that by this time to-morrow Bruin has popped and been accepted."

"And may I ask who Bruin is?" with a slightly supercilious smile.

"Bruin, confound him! is an utter ass, but he goes down with the women-folk because he happens to be the Marquis of Darnley, and with the men because he always knows the best tip for the Derby?"

"Darnley? I shall remember that. Any one else in the field?"

"Yes; they say that Westraven has his eye on her, and Darnley; in fact, a whole heap of fellows. By Jove! if I weren't already booked I would go in for her myself."

"And I. Should I have a chance?"

Lord Marshall looked up and whistled. "Don't want to be rude, old chappie; but the game lies rather too high. Nothing under a duke, or a prince of the blood royal, will suit Lady Val's books."

"Her name isn't Valentine!" with an expression of alarm.

"No, nor Christmas-card; but it's something Frenchified—forget what, exactly. Here we are. Open the door, you fool! Don't you see we want to get out?"—to the guard.

"Humph!" said Colonel Darrell, looking round with his contemptuous smile. "Half the peerage seems to be tumbling on on to the platform!"

Whether half the peerage were there or not there was plenty of room for any number of guests in the carriages which had been sent down from the Castle to meet them.

All the way to Beadesert Colonel Darrell said little, but it is possible he thought the more, as his dark eyes roved from side to side, taking in the beauty of the scene around, and whilst only seeming to admire its beauties measuring the value of park and timber. He would be a lucky man who won the heiress of all this wealth; and if Fortune would only be kind to him for once there was no reason why Lord Darrell should not be the winner as well as anyone else.

He knew himself to be possessed of a nameless power, which could attract or repel as he chose, according to his wish; and if he decided to use it on this girl, the daughter of his father's enemy, the Earl of Beadesert, was there either fiend or angel which could save her from his spell?

Without any fixed purpose he dressed himself with especial care that evening, but

avoided the appearance of too much preparation by omitting to put a flower in his coat. He and his fellow-travellers dined together in a smaller dining-room, as the usual dinner-hour was long past when they arrived. The band had already struck up when they made their appearance at the door of the ball-room—a group of black figures waiting to be noticed.

Lady Valerie cast a shy glance in their direction, and then at a sign from her father dropped Rex Verreker's arm, and advanced gracefully to meet them.

Colonel Darrell bowed low over the small white-gloved hand, and retaining it half an instant longer than was necessary, fixed his eyes on his owner's lovely face.

"Surely we have met before, Lady Valerie?"

She looked up at him in startled inquiry.

"I don't think so."

"In a former existence; if not in this."

"As to that I really cannot say," turning away from him with a light laugh.

"What did that fellow say to you?" asked Verreker, as he regained possession of his partner.

"That we had met before."

"I could take my oath you haven't," looking as fierce as if Darrell had claimed relationship at least. "He only came from Italy three weeks ago. There was a row about him in Florence last winter; the people took it into their heads that he had the Evil eye, and was possessed of Satan besides; but I'll tell you the rest presently, when this waltz is over. It is far too good to lose."

They threaded their way through the maze of the dancers, followed by the eyes of all those who preferred to play the part of lookers-on, and of all the pretty girls in that brilliantly-lighted room not one was to be compared to the Earl's only daughter.

Even Flossie Springgold, the acknowledged belle of the county, was biting her red lips in mortified vanity, and wondering if she had made a mistake in putting on a blue dress instead of a white one, as Rex Verreker, after the first greeting, had never looked once in her direction. Yet he had been her slave, as the saying is, at every party during the winter—a most independent slave truly, and one who gave its present owner constant anxiety lest at some unforeseen moment he might elect to disengage himself free.

Still this constant uncertainty lent a peculiar interest to his capture, and Flossie had almost come to the conclusion in her other moments that if he asked her very much, perhaps one day she might allow herself to be called Mrs. V. Mrs. Verreker! It wouldn't sound bad; but she had always sworn she would be something infinitely higher than a Mrs.

Of course everyone in her own set said the name of Verreker, belonging as it did to one of the oldest families in England, was quite as good as any peerage; but to others, the friends of her girlhood, to whom she had imparted her childish ambitions, she foresaw that she would have to indulge in a series of ignominious explanations; and even then she would be laughed at behind her back.

It only he weren't so terribly handsome! Look at him now talking to Valerie, with that air of devotion which was sure to flatter the girl's vanity and make her think that for the moment at least he really admired her more than all the rest—more than Flossie herself, for instance, whose hair shone like gold in the light of many candles!

It was absurd and very disgusting, but she had no more time to think of it, because the Marquis of Daintree was standing before her, making his lowest bow, and asking for the honour of that dance.

Miss Springgold was engaged, but only to a young lancer, who was at that moment making his way towards her through the crowd; but to her elastic conscience it seemed the most natural thing in the world to throw over a casual lieutenant on the first rung of the social

ladder for a nobleman who had begun at the top.

"Now tell me all you know about Colonel Darrell," said the soft voice of Lady Valerie, as she took a few minutes' rest in the conservatory later on in the evening.

"I would rather talk of something pleasanter," and Rex Verreker bent his eyes admiringly on the sweet face upturned to his. How young and innocent she looked, like a white rosebud picked in the dew! He was so tired of the fashionable women of the world, all striving to emulate each other, and willing to barter anything and everything in order to win the gratification of putting on a prettier dress than a rival—always playing a part—every natural impulse subdued—with complexions as false as their hearts, and lives as tangled as persistent coquetry could make them. His heart seemed to go out in a wave of tenderness towards this child, standing in all the serenity of her innocence on the threshold of her womanhood, with no knowledge of the dangers which might await her in the future, no suspicions of the frauds and temptations, from which neither the highest nor the best beloved can hope to be free. Who would have the right to guard her, to keep her little feet from ever being sprinkled by the false spray of the river of sin, to keep her as the one precious jewel which no money could buy, and which all the gems of the earth would be powerless to replace? Not he, Rex Verreker.

"Did you say there was a story about him in Florence?"

The question roused him from his reverie and he became conscious that he had left the former one unanswered.

"Yes, there was a story, but I can't answer for the truth of it—in fact, there were a great many. If you want to hear them I must ask you to come into the garden, for there must be no eaves-dropping."

CHAPTER III.

FIRST FEAR.

"Well, Darrell, what do you think of her?" said Lord Marshall, laying his hand on the Colonel's shoulder.

Colonel Darrell started, and turned his glowing eyes for a moment on his friend.

"I'm mad about her," he said, quietly. "I wish to Heaven I had never come."

"For her sake or yours?"—with a satirical smile.

"For hers"—in a low tone, which was scarcely audible.

Lord Marshall laughed.

"I wouldn't trouble myself on that score. Go away to-morrow, and there will be an end of it."

"There won't be an end of it. It isn't in my power. You don't understand."

"Nonsense. I understand perfectly. You are head over ears in love, and you make as much fuss about it as if you had never liked a girl before. It has happened to me such scores of times that, 'pon my word, I take no notice of it."

Colonel Darrell's lip curled contemptuously, and for a few minutes he was lost in thought. The ballroom, with its lights and flowers, gradually vanished before his eyes, and as in a dream he seemed to be standing on a vine-covered slope, and the girl who had loved him was lying dead at his feet, with the roses that he had given her fading in her hand. She had obeyed the spell which he had cast over her half in play. And what had been the end of it? A broken heart and a broken life.

A shudder passed through his frame; and looking up abruptly he met the wondering gaze of Lady Valerie. He crossed the room at once, saying to himself,—

"She will be the next. It is fate, it is fate?"

Then he made her a low bow, and presumed that it was impossible for her to give him a dance.

She hesitated, her colour coming and going in her cheeks like sunshine in April.

"This is an extra. I am not engaged," she said, softly, "but—"

"Let there be no 'but'!"—and a gleam of joy lit up his stern features as he stole his arm round her supple waist. The next moment they had started, and the throng followed, the music growing faster and faster, till most of the dancers stopped breathless and exhausted. Colonel Darrell never halted for a moment; his cheek was as white, his breath as steady as before he began, but his pulses were beating wildly and his heart seemed as if it would burst from his bosom. To Lady Valerie it seemed as if under this man's magnetic touch she had lost all power of volition. On and on she must go, her small feet scarcely touching the ground, her whole weight supported by the arm which encircled her waist. Her head dropped like a thirsting flower, her hair touched her partner's coat; an odd sensation that was neither pain nor pleasure, but a mixture of both, came over her. Scarcely conscious of anything but a queer feeling of utter powerlessness she fainted right away, but only for a moment. She was roused by the voice of Rex Verreker, who, with apparently accidental awkwardness, had got in their way, and compelled Darrell, much against his will, to stop.

"Lady Valerie!" he exclaimed, in alarm, without waiting to apologize, "are you ill?"

"I don't know," she said, faintly, as she gave a slight stagger, and looked round her with bewildered eyes as if she had just been roused from her sleep. "I think I want to rest."

"You are tired out," he said, wrathfully. "The idea of dancing through a whole waltz. No one but a feminine Hercules could stand it!"

"Lady Valerie, you dance without an effort. It is no exertion to you," said Darrell, ignoring Verreker completely; "but the atmosphere of the room is oppressive, and you want a breath of air to refresh you."

He was about to lead her down the steps from one of the windows into the garden, but she drew away from him with repugnance that was almost fear, and looked appealingly at Rex.

In an instant he took possession of her, declaring that the next waltz was his, and led her away into the most retired corner of the conservatory, where he stood before her with the air of a sentinel on guard, his blue eyes flashing resentfully, his brave heart beating tumultuously at the thought of danger to the gentle young creature before him. Oh! if he only had the right to stand between her and evil for the rest of her life, not a hair of her head should be hurt.

For some time he did not speak, fancying she would like to be left quiet. From where he stood he could catch a glimpse of Flossie Springgold's sunny head, as she sat on a sofa, half hidden in a bower of flowers, talking with the utmost animation to the Marquis of Daintree. His coronet evidently gave him a special beauty in her eyes, for she was looking up at him as if he were an Adonis—much as she had looked at Rex himself only a few hours before. His upper lip curled in supreme disdain. What an ignoble thing his own flirtation with the little coquette seemed to him then. Was it possible that he had made himself the plaything of an empty-headed, frivolous girl, when all his better instincts warned him against her? He could scarcely credit his own folly, but his memory stood up in judgment against him, and he knew for a fact that week after week, through snow or rain, he had ridden over to Scarsdale Park with but one object in view.

"Mr. Verreker, do you think there is any truth in mesmerism?" said Lady Valerie, her voice still tremulous with emotion.

"None whatever," he answered, confidently, "but why do you ask?"

"Because just now, when dancing with that horrid man, I felt just as if I had lost all power over myself," the colour deepening in her cheeks.

"Because you were faint and over-tired," with a slight smile. "Believe me, in spite of all those stories I told you, there is nothing supernatural about him. Don't have anything to do with him; but, above all, don't be afraid of him."

"Why not?"

"Because it would flatter his vanity. Won't you let me take you into the supper-room? I am sure a glass of champagne would do you good."

"No, thanks. At this time there would be nothing but gentlemen there; but if you could find a servant and ask him for a glass of water—"

"I will go myself," and he hurried off, casting a searching glance round to assure himself that Colonel Darrell was nowhere within sight. No, he was at a safe distance, and his black head was nowhere to be seen; so Valerie could be left for a minute without any danger. Although he had denied it so emphatically, Rex could not help fancying that there was a strange power in the man to which some people would be more sensitive than others, and he determined that Darrell should not come near the Lady Valerie if it were in his power to prevent it.

The supper-room was crowded, and he was stopped by several friends who had not had a chance of a word with him during the whole evening. Rex was one of the most popular men in the county—such a capital shot that the neighbouring squires were always glad to secure him for their shooting days—such a first-rate rider that he was often asked to try a new horse for a friend in a run across country; and to-day he was paying for that popularity rather more dearly than he had any idea of.

He had just torn himself from a round-faced, rosy rooster, who was dying to tell him of his own experiences the day before at one of the public cricket matches, when Miss Springold tapped him on the arm with her fan, and, in a playful voice, asked him if he weren't ashamed of himself?

"Yes," he said, with a good-humoured laugh; "because I must run away from you when I would so much rather stay."

"Must run away?" raising her eyebrows in vexed surprise; "you have done nothing else all night."

"I don't care to run in couples with a man like Daintree," edging off.

"Might I have that glass of water?" seizing at the first excuse for stopping him. "I am positively dying of thirst."

"This is not in your line—simple, unadorned water."

She laid her hand on the glass, and, much against his will, he was obliged to relinquish it.

"I like it best to-night," fixing her blue eyes with the most touching of glances on his good-looking face.

He could not resist the impulse to ask her why, but was sorry the next moment, for she answered, in a whisper,—

"Perhaps because it is the only thing I've had from you."

He blushed—positively blushed! bowed low, then, to her utter disgust, caught up another glass of water from the sideboard and disappeared. He had some difficulty in making his way through the doorway, for a dance had just ended, and the dancers, with flushed faces, were hurrying in quest of cooling drinks; but by dint of some exertion, and a good deal of snubbing to those who wanted to button-hole him, he at length reached the ball-room. Hastening across it with long strides, he came to the glass doors of the conservatory, and, in a few moments, was standing in the same corner where he had left Lady Valerie—looking blankly at the empty seat!

She was not there. A pang of disappointment shot through his heart, which was out of proportion to the occasion. Tired of waiting for him, she had evidently gone off with another partner—but why hadn't he met her

on the way? Besides, she was not the sort of girl to send a man to fetch even so small a thing as a glass of water and go away without waiting to receive it. She was so considerate to all in her gentle womanhood that she would hesitate to give the smallest offence. Perhaps she was ill, and had slipped away to bed.

He met the Earl of Beadesert—a tall, aristocratic looking man, about fifty years of age—and asked him if he knew where his daughter was.

"No," he said, with a smile. "I saw her in the conservatory a minute ago, and she said she was waiting for you."

Rex Verreker turned away with an impatient sigh, and continued his search; but neither in the brilliantly lighted rooms nor on the terrace just outside the windows could he see either the Lady Valerie or that mysterious man, Colonel Darrell, and a vague presentiment of evil filled his heart.

(To be continued.)

OLD MAIDS.—It is a pitiable fact that young women, especially in the middle classes, often marry without love, without even esteem, for him with whom they wed, solely for the purpose of escaping the stigma attached by the ignorant and unthinking to the state of old maidenhood. Are we far wrong in referring to this dread of remaining unmarried the numerous devices to vanity, the flirting, dressing and visiting which retard the growth of many a rational brain, and cause the fathers of gay, expensive daughters to sigh over their rapidly-diminishing means, and half regret the day when they rashly took upon themselves the cares, and risks, and burden of a family? We know we are not. When old maids shall be invariably treated with the respect and consideration which are their due—when the last joke at their expense shall have vanished into the Lethe of forgotten absurdities—then will husband-hunting be at its last gasp, and matrimony again be a sacred thing.

CANDLE SUPERSTITIONS.—So far as number is concerned, the most numerous class of superstitions, is composed of those which cluster round the family candles. The origin of these probably dates far back in antiquity, when the world was full of superstitious fancies about light in general and candle light in particular. When we come down to the early days of the Christian Church, however, we find that not a few of the ordinances of religion were accompanied by ceremonious borrowed from paganism, in which lighted candles played an important part. Candles were lighted at birth to keep off evil spirits, at marriage to prevent the evil eye from affecting the happy pair, and at death to drive away the demons who were thought to be always on the look-out for the soul of the dying man. Naturally then, as candles played so important a part in the ceremonies of religion men became accustomed to regard them with something of a superstitious eye, and to look to them for signs and wonders which were not to be elsewhere found. So a peculiar appearance in the candle, for which no reason could be given, was always regarded as something indicative of some remarkable thing about to happen. A collection of tallow around the wick is still known as a winding-sheet, and is believed to foretell the death of one of the family, while a bright spark is a sign of the future reception of a letter by the person opposite whom the spark is situated, and the waving of the flame without any apparent cause is supposed to demonstrate the presence of a spirit in the room. In addition to these fanciful notions there are some others which are founded on natural facts, too well known to admit of dispute, such as the refusal of the candle to light readily, which indicates a state of atmosphere favourable to a coming storm.

UNDER THE MISTLETOE.

Once again the rolling seasons
Bring the joyous time of year
Blest by sweet association,
And to hope and memory dear!
Darling, how the olden, golden
Christmas lights around me glow,
As I shape my simple idyl
Underneath the Mistletoe!

There was one all-happy morning,
When the sound of village bells
Made a music in the darkness
Of the hollow woods and dells;
When the first faint rose-flesh, waking,
Far by hill, and heath, and lawn,
S-emed the light of heaven, breaking
From the windows of the dawn!

And the sweet bells ringing, ringing,
Syllabled the glad refrain
Of my secret, silent passion:
"I shall see my love again!"
For Glen Allyn's heiress summoned
Her retainers, high and low,
To a merry Christmas keeping,
Underneath the Mistletoe!

How the yule log sulked and sputtered!
(Newly felled in Allyn Wood),
With his gnarly brows a-bristle,
'Neath his grotesque, snowy hood;
And the feasting, and the dancing,
While the players played in tune,
And the antique windows glittered
With the frosty Christmas moon!

You were Mistress Marjory Allyn;
I was simple Ernest Strong,
Plain and homespun; but in silence
I had loved you well and long.
Never, in my wildest dreaming,
Had I dared to hope—till lo!
Some sweet sorcery fell upon us,
Under the Mistletoe!

Blushing, downcast, palpitating
To your rosy finger-tips!
Dear, your secret dawned upon me
At the meeting of our lips!
Well I knew, at last, you loved me;
And the yule-fire's dying glow
Shone upon our fond betrothal,
Underneath the Mistletoe!

E. A. R.

THE FAIR ELAINE.

CHAPTER L.—(continued.)

"I WAS very glad to settle it upon you, Arley," Philip answered evasively; he wondered what she would say if she knew that it was but a very small portion of his legacy. "But," he continued humbly, "now that you know I come by it honestly, if you would accept it, it would take such a load from my mind—it has driven me nearly mad, since I came to my senses, to think of you, who, until that fatal day two years ago, never knew a care, tolling for your own living. I know I have no right to sue to you for favours, but there are two that I beg you in mercy to grant me, if I must indeed take up the burden of life again; one is to keep this money—let me have the comfort of knowing that I have thrown that mass of care and protection about you; the other—oh! Arley be pitiful—enough of forgiveness to cause you to regard me with something of compassion instead of hatred."

His voice broke in the appeal. It was like the cry of a drowning man—agonizing, beseeching, yet almost hopeless.

Arley's heart melted within her. She could never doubt his sincerity after that.

She got up from her chair, and going to the door, looked it. She wished no intruders to

conscious upon that interview. Then she went back and sat down beside him again.

"Philip," she began, in a trembling voice, as she bent towards him—and, with a great heart-throb, he saw that the tears were rolling swiftly over her cheeks—"when I read in the paper that you were injured and would probably die, the fountains of my heart seemed to be instantly unsealed, and my first act was to cry to Heaven to save you, and—I would forgive all. Philip, I—I have forgiven."

"Don't do that, please," she continued, as a great sob burst from him at those blessed words. "I cannot bear to see you weep; and I must tell you that I returned to England with very hard and bitter feelings against you. I said that I would never forgive you—that I would never even look upon your face again if I could help it. But, at the very first, your letter staggered me. I felt, even though I did not like to acknowledge it, that the ring of true repentance was in it, even though it revealed depths of evil and wrong of which I had never dreamed. Then I was even more amazed at receiving the quarterly allowance from Mr. Holley, and to learn that you had settled a fortune upon me. But this hardened me somewhat again, for I believed, as you surmise, that you had not come by it honestly. I feel sure that you could not have earned it with business ever so flourishing, and I reasoned that only a successful handling of cards or dice could have put you in possession of it, and a freak of some kind had prompted you to settle it upon me. But one day I met Eddie Winthorpe in the Academy. He was looking at my pictures—"

Philip uttered a low exclamation of surprise at this.

"Were you that lady? He came home full of enthusiasm over a lady whom he had met—an artist he said she was—and who had told him so much about painting, and was very kind to him."

"Yes, it was I," Arley returned; "and from him I learned of all that you had done and were still doing for him—how sad you were, how hard you were working, and how ill you seemed to be. From that hour my feelings towards you began to change, though I fought against it. I had been unhappy enough before—I was doubly wretched then; for I knew that you were aiming at a better life—if you were truly repentant and striving to become again the noble man I once believed you to be. I was wrong to cherish such a bitter and unforgiving spirit towards you. I imagined that all love was long since dead. I tried, at all events, to think so; for, in my pride and anger, I said that no woman could love a man who had used her so—no one could overlook and forgive what I had suffered. But when I read that paragraph in the paper there came a sudden revulsion—hush! you must not do so," she interposed, for the strong man had broken down utterly, and was sobbing like a child, while the tears rained over his cheeks.

It was no shame for him to weep thus—it was an honour, rather, to his manhood; and very tenderly Arley wiped those tears away, feeling that everyone was a precious pledge of future happiness, and of the love, and care, and tenderness with which he would surround her henceforth.

"Oh, say it again—that you have forgiven!" he pleaded, when he could command himself sufficiently to speak.

"Yes, all—everything; and"—she bent closer over him, her cheeks a rich crimson, a look in her beautiful dark eyes which set all his pulses bounding and his heart throbbing with a wild, sweet hope—"and it is not merely from a sense of duty either, Philip; it is because I still love you as in those first beautiful days at Hazelmere."

"Oh, my darling!"

It was a cry of wonder, almost of awe, at this evidence of a full, free, and absolute pardon.

His voice was weak and thick; he trembled with excitement, and he reached forth, grasp-

ing her hands in a clasp that was almost painful.

She smiled as she tried to soothe him.

"I shall have to stop if you excite yourself thus," she said; "but I find that my heart has been a traitor all along; my love has never died, it has only been benumbed, and the change in you has aroused it to new life, in spite of every effort to the contrary."

"I do not see how there can be an atom of love in it for me, Arley," Philip said, in a wondering tone.

"Had I been a maiden I never could have confessed this to you, Philip; but being your wife, I suppose I have a right to do so," Arley said, softly; but her face was averted and covered with blushes as she spoke.

"It is the most blessed confession ever granted to an erring man; say it again, Arley," he pleaded, as if, even now he doubted the evidence of his own senses.

Lower and lower bent the beautiful flushed face, until her lips almost touched his ear.

"I love you, Philip," she whispered.

There was a moment of utter silence; then he broke it.

"Oh, my wife! I never, never dared to hope for this; I never dared to believe that you could do more than say, 'I forgive; go and sin no more'; and I should have tried to live out my life apart from you, content even to have gained so much."

He wound his arms about her and held her in his trembling clasp.

"My darling," he went on, "can it be true? Is it possible that after all my villainies and cruelty I am to be so blessed as this? How I have treated you! and yet I have always loved you, Arley, strange as it may seem. It was a selfish love at first, I own, but genuine—as far as I was able to love anyone besides myself and my ambition. Do you remember that evening at Hazelmere when you fastened that flower upon my coat, and I called you the Wentworth Rose? No one had ever quickened my pulse as you did then, with your pretty, piquant ways, and even afterwards, when I had won you—chiefly for your money, I own it with shame, dear—there was a feeling of tenderness for you which I had never experienced for any other during all my life. But I began to awake to a deeper, nobler love that day in the court-room at Madrid. My whole soul was thrilled as I looked into your pure face, and listened to your noble, appealing words."

"But the demons of avarice and self-will were in full possession of me then, and I seemed to have no power to tear myself from their influence, though, for a moment, I was almost upon the point of yielding to you. It was only when I had brought my evil game to an abrupt end by making audacious proposals to Lady Elaine, and she had hurled her scorn and contempt with crushing force at me, and then, pitying the weak dolt who had been so imbecile, had appealed to me, something as you had done, to turn my course and become a man, that I came to my senses and realised the depth to which I had sunk."

"Then I realised all I had lost; looking back over the past, and remembering your patience, your forbearance, your unvarying kindness, a wild and hopeless love took possession of me, and I vowed that I would make myself the man you believed me to be when you met me at Hazelmere. It was the only hope of comfort I had for the future, that I might eventually come up to your ideal of a noble man."

"At times I have nearly gone mad with thinking what happiness might have been mine but for my own folly, and when I learned of your return I prayed that I might die, for I felt that it would be continual torture to live here in London with you, and never be permitted to see you. When you sent back that money to me it was like a dagger plunged into my heart, for it told me that even the comfort of providing for your needs was to be denied me. But, oh! you have told me that you love me still, you have acknowledged

yourself as my wife, my cup of happiness is almost too full!"

Arley thought that it was time for this exciting talk to end.

It was very sweet to be thus enfolded in his arms and to feel that at last her burdens were all removed, and she could henceforth trust in his love and feel it to be the most precious thing in life.

But he was spent with the excitement of the past half-hour and needed rest.

Gently releasing herself from his clinging arms, she said,—

"You must be quiet for awhile now; it will not do for you to talk any more at present. I fear you are too weary already. Will you try to sleep?"

"Yes, my darling, if you will promise not to leave me; for if I wake and find you gone I shall fear that all this blessedness has been but a dream."

"I will not leave you," Arley said; "drink this, and then I will sit by you until you wake."

She held a nourishing drink to his lips, and he took it with relish.

"Now sleep, dear," she said, and bending, with a shy smile on her lips, she touched them to his with the first, the only kiss she had ever given him since their marriage morn.

CHAPTER LI.

PERFECT FAITH.

PHILIP'S convalescence was quite rapid after the events related in the last chapter; happiness is a great restorer, and he began to gain strength so fast that the surgeon told him he would not be obliged to remain in the hospital more than a fortnight longer at that rate.

"And, Mrs. Paxton," he said to Arley, whose face seemed to gain new beauty and brightness in proportion to Philip's progress, "one would almost imagine that you had also been suddenly restored from a severe illness, for I never saw such a change in anyone before as there has been in you since your husband began to recover."

"It is not strange, is it, that I should rejoice to have my husband restored to me?" she asked, somewhat tremulously, but he did not dream how much of significance her question contained, although Philip understood it well.

"No—no, indeed," he returned; "but really you seem like an entirely different person from what you were when you came here."

And he was right; for she seemed suddenly to have been transformed from the sad-faced, unhappy woman who had come there expecting to see her husband die, into the bright and beautiful Arley whom we first knew at Hazelmere.

She was somewhat more mature and dignified in her bearing, but with love and happiness blossoming anew in her heart, with every trace of the old bitterness and despair wiped out, the lines of pain faded from her face like magic, her beautiful dark eyes grew bright and sparkling, a lovely flush tinged her cheeks, and her mournful lips were wreathed with smiles once more.

The first time that Lady Elaine saw her after her reconciliation with Philip, she exclaimed:—

"Ah! you have good news for me—Philip is better."

"Yes, darling," Arley said, joyfully, "going to get well, and—we are both better in body and soul."

Lady Elaine understood at once, and kissed her with tremulous lips.

"I am so thankful," she murmured, "my own sister, may Heaven grant that all your future be bright—that no other shadow ever fall upon it."

Tears sprang to Arley's eyes, and she mentally cried:—

"Oh, if I could only bring back happiness to her sorrowful heart."

"Have you told him who you are?" Lady Elaine asked later.

"No, not yet—I want to enjoy the luxury

of being loved for myself—a poor, nameless wretch, who has not a bit of dower with which to enrich her lord—for a while," Arley returned, with shining eyes, adding: "There will be time enough for disclosures by-and-by."

"Have you been with Miss McAllister ever since your return to London?" Philip asked her one day, when she had been telling him of her travels with Lady Hertford and her son.

"No, not all the time," Arley answered, a slight flush rising in her cheek. "I was with her for a while until Lady Elaine decided to open Mordaunt House once more, and I have been with her, as a sort of companion, since then."

"Ah! then Mordaunt House has been reopened!" said Philip, somewhat surprised. "How does Lady Hamilton get along without her?"

"She does not get along without—she has consented to make Mordaunt House her home whenever she is in London, and Elaine will spend a good deal of time, as before, at Hazelmere."

"What does Lady Elaine think of me?" Philip asked, a deep flush rising to his brow, and a troubled look in his eyes.

"She thinks she will be very proud to own you as a 'brother,'" Arley had almost said, but she hastily substituted the word "friend," she knows of all that you have been doing during the past year—she honours you for it, and—she helped make your peace with me."

"Heaven bless her!" he said, heartily. "I believe the Lily of Mordaunt is almost an angel. Poor Wil," he added, with a heavy sigh.

"Yes, Elaine is the most lovely character I have ever known. Her sorrow is the only bitter drop in my cup now," Arley answered, echoing his sigh.

"Where would you like to live, Arley, when I am able to go away from here?" he asked, at another time.

"Almost anywhere within our means, dear," she returned, with downcast looks. "You know," she added, with a mischievous glance out of the corner of her eye, "to quote a homely adage, 'beggars mustn't be choosers.'"

"Don't, darling, speak in that way of yourself," Philip said, really pained; "but," he added, after a moment, "I am glad that you are poor and nameless, as you used to say, for now I can prove to you that I really love you for yourself alone."

"Do you dare to call the wife of Philip Paxton 'nameless'? Do you consider me 'poor' when I have twenty thousand pounds in my own right in the Bank of England?" she demanded shyly.

"I have the best of the argument notwithstanding," he retorted, smiling, "for you are indebted to me for both name and fortune. I cannot help glorying in the fact, after all my cruelty in the past, and my whole future life shall be devoted to you, my beloved. But you have not yet told me where you would like to live. How would you enjoy spending a portion of the year in the country?"

"I should enjoy it exceedingly; but that would interfere with your business, would it not? Besides, it would be very expensive."

"But my business has been in a flourishing condition of late, and will, doubtless, continue to be when I can get at it again, and I think it will warrant our consulting our taste and inclination regarding a home."

"Will you still keep Eddie?" Arley asked. "I should like to, if you do not object," Philip answered, regarding her somewhat anxiously.

"I should object to his being sent away from you," she said, earnestly. "I think he is a very promising boy; and since he is so interested in art he will make a most agreeable companion for me. Perhaps it would be wise for us to take rooms in London for a while, and not be too hasty about deciding upon a permanent home."

She said this merely to test him, and never

once suspected that he had been trying her in the same way.

"Very well, Arley," he said, quietly; "I shall be governed by your wishes in all things. I perceive that you are rather fearful regarding the cost, but you need not be, for I shall never trouble you hereafter by living beyond my means," he concluded, with a peculiar smile.

She smiled, too, thinking of the fortune which had recently come to her, and how ample their income would be for almost any kind of life which they might choose to live; while, on the other hand, his plans were all matured, and he knew just what he would do.

Arley had said that she should enjoy the country exceedingly, and, with a thrill of joy, he had said to himself:

"We will go to Elmsford to live. That grand old place will, after all, become my home. I can assume the duties of my new position, and—Arley will be Lady Paxton! I will go there, have everything made ready for her, and then surprise her with her new home and the secret which I have been keeping from every one."

Eddie was admitted to see Philip as soon as it was thought that he was able to receive visitors, and his surprise and delight upon learning that Arley was his Uncle Philip's wife, can be better imagined than described.

"There has been a misunderstanding between Mrs. Paxton and myself, for which I was wholly to blame," Philip explained to him while Arley was out of the room for a few moments. "I do not want the subject ever referred to hereafter, but I wished you to understand that it was entirely my fault that we were separated."

"Yes, sir," Eddie said, with a wistful look at him, as if loth to believe that he could do anything very wrong. "I thought," he added, "that she wasn't very happy when I saw her at the Academy; but I'm sure she's all right now, for she has grown—oh, so much more beautiful than she was then! May I call her auntie?"

"If she likes you to do so, yes," and it is needless to say that Arley cheerfully granted him the privilege he desired.

At the end of a fortnight from the time that he began to improve, Philip was pronounced well enough to leave the hospital.

"My first work shall be to make a home for my wife," he said on the evening before he was to go, "but I shall be obliged to go out of town on business for a little while first, and it is impossible to take you with me, much as I dislike being separated from you just now. Will you go and take possession of my rooms until I return, or will you prefer to go back to Lady Elaine until I come for you?"

"I will go to her until you are ready for me, Philip, if you will allow Eddie to remain with me. I shall be very lonely without you in a strange place. But," she added, a shadow flitting over her face, "is it absolutely necessary that you go? Cannot you send someone to attend to this business for you? I fear you are not able to travel yet; besides—"

"Besides what, my beloved?" he questioned, fondly but gravely, as she hesitated, and fearing that she was still doubting him somewhat.

"I cannot bear to let you go away from me now that I have you back once more," she confessed, blushing like a shy girl, and hiding her face upon his shoulder.

"Oh! Arley!" he cried, in a voice in which pain and joy were blended, "I do not deserve that you should love me like this. Oh! if I could only wipe out from your memory and mine the past two years."

"Hush," she said, gently, "I do not believe that such a wish is right. Perhaps we both needed just that discipline to fit us for the future."

"And is there no root of bitterness left in your heart? Way down in its deepest recess is there no scorn or contempt for me?"

"None, Philip," she answered, with a grave

sweetness, "the remembrance of the past will gradually grow to be like a dream to me; and now I can only rejoice to find that the man whom I have loved is no mere myth, an ideal, but a reality. Perhaps, Philip, if you had never been subjected to the temptations which have so beset you during these two years, you never would have known the strength of character which you possess."

"The weakness you should have said," he interrupted, bitterly.

"Nay, you are strong," she persisted, "for you have come forth from the battle a conqueror—you are like a hero who has fallen time after time before his assailants, but who has bravely struggled up again to oppose them; who has been desperately wounded, and will carry the scars of the conflict to the end of his life, but who goes to show that victory crowned him at last."

"Your words are very comforting—you are very lenient in your judgment of me," he replied, sorrowfully, "but if I had not dragged you down with me—if I had not wounded you also, I could bear it better. Do you know," he added, earnestly, "that I would like the marriage service to be repeated over us? That other seems like a mockery—it was a mockery on my part, though Heaven knows that the vows which I have registered in my heart since you have given yourself back to me are as solemn and sincere as love and true repentance can make them."

Arley lifted her face, all shining with tenderness and joy, and kissed him.

"Let us never refer to the past again, please," she said; "let us, though we have been husband and wife in the eyes of the world for two years, date our real marriage from now, and never again go back to it. I give myself to you without reservation; I love you wholly, perhaps with even more of depth and tenderness than I did when you asked me, at Hazelmere, to be your wife. I have perfect faith in you, too, Philip, so do not let us mar our life with vain regrets or morbid repinings. The only thing that troubles me now is that you must leave me, but—you will not be long away," she pleaded, in conclusion.

"No longer than I can possibly help, dear. I do not know just how much of an undertaking I have before me, but you may rest assured that I shall not remain away from my newly-recovered treasure a day longer than I can possibly help."

The following morning Arley saw him start away on his trip, and then went back to Mordaunt House, to wait with what patience she could for his return.

Lady Elaine welcomed her back with delight.

"But," she said, between smiles and tears, "there is 'always a thorn with a rose,' and I cannot bear to think that you will, perhaps, have to leave me again. I am glad and thankful for your happiness, Arley, but I shall miss my sister."

"We will not be separated more than is absolutely necessary," Arley returned. "I suppose that Lady Hamilton will claim you a portion of the time, but I shall insist upon having you the rest."

"I expect I shall be between two fires all the time," Lady Elaine responded, smiling. "But when are you going to tell Philip of our discovery, my Lady Alice?"

"When he returns; we are then to decide about our future home, and I cannot delay the revelation longer, for, of course, a daughter of the house of Mordaunt will have a fitting residence in which to entertain her beloved sister and friends," Arley said, smiling, and not having the slightest suspicion that Philip had taken those matters into his own hands, and was even then discussing with his steward the elegant furnishings which were to embellish Elmsford in honour of the home-coming of his wife.

CHAPTER LII.

WIL. HAMILTON.

SIR CHARLES HERBERT and Ida Wentworth rode in Rotten-Row, according to the arrangement made during the evening spent at Mordaunt House, and the young baronet thought that he had never seen a picture more fair than the lovely girl made, seated upon her glossy, chestnut-colored, her graceful form clad in a perfectly fitting habit of dark green cloth, a hat of the same colour, with a long, sweeping plume, upon her small head, a delicate flush upon her cheeks, and a shy, tell-tale light in her beautiful eyes, which assured him that the project which he had in view would not prove an unsuccessful one.

"I fear you will not think me a very accomplished horsewoman," she said, patting the shining neck of the beautiful horse, after Sir Charles had assisted her to mount, and while he was arranging her stirrups; "so I trust you have not given me an animal that will require expert management."

She had ridden considerably, and was very fond of the exercise, but she was always a little timid upon a strange horse.

Sir Charles gave her a look which sent the lovely colour sweeping into her cheeks.

"I never could have trusted you upon Jot—nor indeed upon any horse—without first being perfectly assured that there was not the slightest danger, from either its disposition or education. You will find my pretty mare a perfect lamb to manage; yet like a bird for speed," he said.

That ride was one never to be forgotten by either of them.

They rode for nearly an hour in Rotten-Row among the *Alles*, who gather there to display their elegant costumes and thoroughbreds, then they turned their horses' heads for a smart canter out on the ride to Windsor, where, far from the noise and confusion of the city, with only the birds and whispering boughs of the over-arching trees for witnesses, Sir Charles told the gentle girl of his love for her, and won her promise to be his wife.

"I have been a doomed man," he said, with a fond smile, when at length they turned their faces homeward; "ever since that day when I made my first call upon Mrs. Paxton, after her return. It is strange how much has hinged upon the mere chance of my being in that court-room in Madrid, and espousing her cause."

"Chance!" Ina repeated, lifting her beautiful eyes to his face with a look of inquiry. "Do you think that anything in the world happens by 'chance'?"

"What else would you call it, dear? The fact of my having wandered aimlessly into that court just at that particular time? I had not the least object beyond idle curiosity to see how they conducted legal affairs in Spain."

"I believe that you were sent to save Arley, just as you did save her. I think people are too apt to attribute many events of life to 'chance,' simply because they do not realize what power it is that impels and governs them—*they* imagine them to be merely 'happenings.' But nothing 'happens.' God rules," Ina concluded, reverently.

"And always for the best, I suppose you would say, since you seem to trust Him so implicitly." Sir Charles returned, regarding her gravely.

"Yes, always for the best," she answered, with sweet seriousness.

"Then, according to your theory, God has given you to me. I bless Him for the gift," Sir Charles said, drawing nearer to look down into those wonderful blue-grey eyes, and speaking with thrilling earnestness.

"Yes, He has given us to each other," Ina replied, with a slight trembling of her red lips. "How happy I am!" she added, softly, a moment after, "who would ever have believed, when I was a poor little waif in that fisherman's hut, that so much blessedness was laid up for me in the future!"

Sir Charles reached out and took possession of the small, prettily gloved hand that rested upon the pommel of the saddle.

"My darling, what blessedness I have secured for the remainder of my life, since I am to have so sweet and gentle a monitor ever by my side. But," with a searching glance into her blushing face, "how will your theory held good in connection with Mrs. Paxton's sad experiences, and the cruel bereavement which has fallen upon Lady Elaine Warburton?"

"It is not 'my theory,' it is not a 'theory,' at all," Ina returned, earnestly. "It is a living truth. God's ways are always right and best. He can see beyond and over all. He is like an experienced gardener who knows just how to prune, and graft, and train the plants under his care; He sometimes cuts off the most brilliant buds, the most promising shoots, in a way which, to those not understanding His motive, would seem like the most wanton destruction, when in reality the future life and beauty of the plant depended upon just that kind of treatment."

"But Arley Paxton would tell you that her life was ruined. Lady Elaine would say that she does not expect any real happiness this side of Heaven," Sir Charles said, thoughtfully.

"I hardly think that either of them would say just that," Ina returned, smiling; "although they both believe that much of sorrow will be mingled with all their future; but Arley is a better, a stronger woman already, for the trouble which she has had to bear, and she may live to see the wisdom of it; if she does not she will surely realize it hereafter, while Lady Elaine carries nothing but blessing with her wherever she goes. I have been told that someone has named her the 'Lily of Mordaunt,' and most fittingly, I think, for her life is as full of beauty and fragrance as a lily."

"But it is very sad that her prospects should have been so destroyed."

"Yes, it is sad," Ina said, with a wistful look up into the handsome face by her side. "I fear that I could not bear such a trial with the patience and sweetness which she has manifested."

"We will not allow such a fear to mar this day," Sir Charles said, with a fond pressure of the hand which he still held. "And now, with your permission, I am going home with you to tell Miss McAllister that I have won her treasure. Will she be very severe upon me, do you think?"

Ina broke into a low, musical laugh, though the beautiful colour swept over her whole face at his words.

"Auntie would never do or say anything to make any one unhappy," she said.

"Would she not?" returned Sir Charles, with a mischievous glance. "Then I shall tell her that two months is all the time I shall allow my bride-elect for necessary preparations."

"Oh, Sir Charles—" Ina began in a startled tone.

"Why should I not have you, my darling, just as soon as possible?" asked the fond lover, and she could not tell "why not."

(To be continued.)

ARTIFICIAL SEA AIR.—Many, indeed, are the luxuries that the magician's wand of invention now brings into the midst of our homes. As an instance, to produce a sea atmosphere for the sick room, a foreign contemporary suggests the use of a solution of peroxide of hydrogen (ten volumes strength) containing 1 per cent. of ozonic ether, iodine to saturation, and 2.50 per cent. of sea salt. The solution placed in a steam or hand spray diffuser can be distributed in the finest spray in the sick-room at the rate of two fluid ounces in a quarter of an hour. It communicates a pleasant sea odour, and is probably the best purifier of the air of the sick-room ever used.

THE GIFT OF THE GOOD FAIRY.

One chill winter's morning a little maiden sat weeping by the roadside.

She was young, dark-haired, dark-eyed—not beautiful as the world regards beauty, and yet not unpleasant to look upon; for there was an intelligent gleam in those large brown eyes, a bright sheen upon that waving brown hair, and a dewy rosy glow upon those usually smiling lips, that was not altogether unattractive.

She was a brave little maid usually, possessing no small amount of self-reliance and a kind and tender heart; but just now the world was using her very badly.

Lizette was an orphan. She had no friends, no home, save an humble little room where she lived alone, and supported herself by making dainty and original little sketches with a tiny, silver-pointed wand, which, once upon a time, a good fairy had given her and taught her how to use.

These sketches she sold to the villagers, who thought Lizette's gift something wonderful, and were never tired of telling how the kind fairy had come one night while she slept, laid her magical hand upon her brow, and, leaving the tiny, silver-pointed wand in her nimble fingers, had gone away, while ever since she had earned her livelihood by deftly using it.

Lizette had a lover—a manly lad, with light hair, kind blue eyes, a gentle smile, a true, brave heart, and a pair of willing hands.

But Sidney was poor as well as Lizette, and try hard as he might, he could not seem to gather together enough of this world's goods to make a home so that he could marry her.

As soon as he would get a fair start, some evil genius would give him a set back, and he would have to begin all over again.

"Never mind, my darling," he always said, hopefully and cheerily to Lizette, although his blue eyes looked wistfully and sadly into hers. "I'll try again, and perchance I shall do better next time."

But ill-luck still attended him, and only the night before this chill, dreary day, he had been told her that some marplot had misrepresented him to his employers, who had taken all his business from him, and he would be obliged to go into another town to get work, while there was no knowing when he would be able to return to her.

This of itself was enough to nearly break the heart of poor Lizette; but, to cap the climax, someone had broken into her little room after she had sobbed herself to sleep, and stolen nearly all the pretty little sketches which she had been preparing for Christmas, and this additional calamity almost crushed her.

She had not laid in her fuel for winter; her food was nearly gone, and she had been so intent on her work that she had neglected to provide herself with proper clothing.

What should she do?

It would take her a long time to replace her sketches—the Christmas holidays would then be passed, and there would be no sale for them.

But she must have something to eat and something to wear; so calling what courage she could to her aid she started forth with her only remaining sketch to try and sell it, so that she could have food and a warm frock.

It was some distance to the village, and on the way she was obliged to pass the palace of the prince of the province.

As she drew near it she looked up at its gleaming towers and glittering windows, and thought how delightful it must be to have everything that heart could wish. Within all the royal household were, of course, enjoying every comfort and luxury; not one of them knew what it was to be cold or hungry, or homeless and friendless.

The keen wind pierced through her thin garments, making her shiver and her teeth chatter, while her feet and hands were almost

nurs from the intense cold, and her heart ached with a sense of desolation such as she had never known before.

She sat down upon a great rock by the roadside and sobbed as if her heart was breaking. Suddenly a voice startled her.

"Little maid, why do you weep?" it said.

She looked up quickly, brushing the glittering tears hastily aside, and saw the prince of the province standing beside her.

She had never seen him before, but she knew him, for she had heard others describe him, while he wore a glittering star upon his breast which no one else had a right to wear.

He was not handsome, as Lizette had always supposed, but her heart was instantly drawn to him, for he had such kind, dark eyes, such a pleasant smile, such gentle, mellow, sympathetic tones.

"Why do you weep, my child?" he asked again, and smiling to see the look of reverence which had stolen over her face at sight of him.

"Because I have no food, no fire, no clothes, and someone has stolen all my sketches save this one," Lizette answered, with trembling lips.

"Sketches! Can you sketch?" the great Prince asked, eyeing the forlorn little maiden with surprise.

A rich colour came into her cheeks, and a gleam of hope into her eyes.

She had worked hard in the past and tried to improve the talent which the fairy had given her, and she had often thought that if she could have a better opportunity she might make her mark in the world.

Perhaps the opportunity had come.

"Yes," she answered, drooping her lids over her shining eyes, "when my father and mother died, a good fairy brought me a little wand and taught me how to use it; the villagers have bought my sketches and helped me to earn my living. Always at Christmas they buy a good many for gifts, but last night some thief stole all that I had made save this poor little one, which will scarce pay for the bread I shall eat until I can make others."

"Let me see it," the Prince said, holding out his hand for it, and Lizette laid her one remaining treasure upon his palm.

He smiled kindly as he took it, expecting to behold only some childish fancy roughly executed. But his dark eye kindled as he examined it, and he looked astonished at the delicacy and finish of the work.

"To whom will you sell this?" he asked.

"To whoever will buy it," Lizette said, mournfully, while she shivered again with cold.

"I will buy it, then," he returned gently, and taking a piece of gold from his pocket, he dropped it into her lap.

Then unclasping the mantle of rich, dark fur from his neck, he threw it around her shoulders, saying kindly,—

"This will keep you warm, little maid—take it as my Christmas gift to you. Now go home and make me another sketch as quickly as you can, for I will buy all that you can make if they please me as well as this one pleases me, and you need never be cold or hungry again."

He went away before she could find words to thank him, for she was speechless from surprise that this great prince should treat her so kindly.

But she wrapped the soft seal-skin about her, feeling warmed and cheered already, and with that piece of shining gold clasped tightly in her hand she sped home feeling rich as any queen, and not quite sure that she should not wake up soon and find it all a dream.

When she went to rest that night with only the stars shining in upon her for light, she knelt and prayed that every good thing of earth might be given to the prince who had been so kind to her, while she invoked anew the aid of the good fairy to whom she already owed so much.

What was her surprise in the morning on waking to find that, during the night,

some magic hand had tipped her wand with gold where before it had been silver!

With a fluttering heart and gleaming eyes she tenderly took it up, when her hand began to glide over her paper upon a theme of such beauty as she had never executed before, and she laughed aloud in glee as she felt a strange power rising within her—a power which henceforth, with the exercise of patience and perseverance, would relieve her from all want.

For days and days she toiled at her small table, one thought uppermost in her mind—to please the kind prince who had so befriended her in her time of trouble.

Christmas came and went, but Lizette had no holiday—another year, perhaps, she might grant herself that indulgence; but now she must work.

A few days later the postman knocked at her door, then opening it, tossed in a package and went away.

Lizette's heart leaped.

Was it from Sidney?

No, it was a bolder hand than his that had written her name upon the wrapper.

Tearing it eagerly off she uttered a low cry when she saw what was within.

It was a far-famed journal which the prince and his brother published, sending it far and wide over the provinces among their subjects, that they might thus become educated and refined; and, wonder of wonders! there upon the title page appeared Lizette's own theme, copied most beautifully.

How her brown eyes danced! how her red lips smiled! while she clapped her hands with delight, and then, cheered and inspired, she returned to her work with tenfold eagerness.

Another week there came a great box to Lizette with a message from the prince, saying that she must study, she must improve, she must become refined in her tastes and ideas, and then her work would grow more beautiful still, and so he had sent her some helpers.

"How kind, how thoughtful!" she murmured, with a radiant face, as she went down on her knees before the box to open it.

She lifted the lid, and, lo! a set of wonderful books—books such as she had dreamed about, but had not thought of ever being able to possess—presented themselves to her astonished vision.

"How wise I shall be!" she cried, with a gleeful laugh; "how much I shall know, with these for my constant companions. Study shall be my watchword, improvement and success my aim."

Her second work was at length completed, and with a timid heart she sent it to the prince, and then awaited with fear and trembling for his verdict.

It came at length.

"Well done, little maid; work away," and a handful of gold rolled into her lap.

Lizette caught her breath: she had never thought that the fairy's gift would bring her so much, and the possibilities of the future began to be almost dazzling to her.

"Ah, Sidney, Sidney, we will be happy yet—we will have our own beautiful home yet, my love," she murmured, softly, while she touched each separate gold piece with her scarlet lips.

With such encouragement as this, it was no wonder that she was inspired with new zeal, and that it became a pleasure to trace the faintest things which her brain could invent for the princes to send abroad to their people. Nothing could be too good for those who had been so kind to her, and every energy was bent to her task.

And thus the months sped by.

The sad face and mournful eyes of the girl who, only a little while before, had been so forlorn, grew bright and hopeful; smiles leaped to her lips, gay songs rang out as she worked, her eyes grew luminous with happiness, and her heart light as a bird's.

She was a faithful little worker, for she spared neither time nor strength, while she had a dear object for which she was labouring besides the great prince's approval.

Spring came, and with it another message from them. Lizette was doing well, but they wished to help her to do even better; she must go away from the quiet village which had always been her home; she must go among new scenes; she must see the world and different people, study their manners and customs, look upon works of art, and traverse his/er/oric ground, so that her works in the future might become more finished and acceptable.

"Ah!" she thought, as she read this message, "the hour of my supreme delight has come! Now I shall grow wise, I shall expand. I shall see and hear and learn wonderful things, and my life, as well as my works, will grow beautiful. I wonder can Lizette be herself, with so much that she has wished for pouring in upon her?"

With joy she prepared to obey this message, but before she went she made a journey to the palace of the prince to bid him farewell, and thank him for making his commands so pleasant.

He received her most kindly. His dark eyes were full of sunshine; his lips were wreathed with gracious smiles, while kind and pleasant words dropped, like pearls, from them.

He introduced her to his brother prince, who had a genial face, though there was a sad look in his blue eyes, as if in some secret chamber of heart there lay a great sorrow, and there were silver threads mixed with the gold of his hair.

They were very different, one so fair, the other so dark; and ever after, in her heart, Lizette designated them as the Dark Prince and the Light Prince.

The dark prince showed her all over his wonderful palace, and into a busy place where the far-famed journal was prepared, explaining all the different work, and showing her how her own sketches were copied, and she wondered to see how he devoted himself to the interests of the subjects of his province.

Then he brought her into the presence of the princess and the two lovely young princesses, his daughters, who were very gracious to her, and Lizette thought how happy and proud the prince must be of their beauty and grace.

Ah! she was very happy, too, that day, and as she turned to bid this kind friend farewell before going upon her journey, she touched her lips to his hand, and lifting her humid eyes to his face, murmured,—

"Some ill fate may befall me. I may never return; but, oh! prince, let me tell you that you have bestowed upon me the greatest pleasure of my life."

Time will not allow to tell of all the wonderful sights, the visions of delight, the scenes of enchantment through which Lizette passed during her wanderings; of the knowledge which she acquired, the new thoughts and ideas for future work which she gained, but she returned, at length, all aglow with zeal, and feeling that no matter what might come to her afterwards she could never be really poor or sad or lonely again with the rich experiences of those bright months stored in her memory, while with feelings of deepest gratitude toward the princes who had bestowed so much good upon her, she resumed her golden-tipped wand and wielded it with all the energy and faithfulness of which she was capable, for them.

Meanwhile Sidney was reaping the reward of his own perseverance in another district, and kept writing to Lizette that the future was growing to look brighter every day.

He knew that she was well and happy, and had constant employment, but he did not know the extent of her good fortune, for this she was keeping as a pleasant surprise for him.

He wrote that he should come to her at Christmas, and that he should bring her a gift—that gift would be a wedding-ring, and she must make ready to be his wife. He said that he had made money enough to start himself in a fair way in business, and he should not leave his own home again.

"I cannot give you such a home as I would

like, my darling," he wrote, "but that will all come in good time, please Heaven. I am only too happy that I can bring the ring to put upon your finger, and we will make our nest together by-and-by."

Lizette smiled wisely as she read his tender letter, then with a song in her heart, bent even more industriously to her own work.

Christmas Eve came again, and with it came Sidney to claim his bride, for the wedding had been fixed for that evening by a special licence.

Lizette met him at the door of her humble room, her dark eyes radiant, her lips and cheeks scarlet, her brown hair laid in a massive coil around her shapely head, while nestling among its glossy waves were pure, bridal flowers.

She was all in white—there was no colour about her save on cheeks and lips, and as Sidney folded her in his strong arms he murmured fondly:

"My Lizette—mine alone for all time."

Hand-in-hand they went to the little church where they said the words which made them one, and then the sympathising villagers who had been bidden to the marriage feast, formed a triumphal procession, and led them forth, strewing flowers along their path as they went.

"Where are we going, Lizette? This is not the way to the inn," Sidney said, as they turned before reaching the public-house where he had expected they were to eat the wedding feast.

Lizette smiled archly as she whispered:

"Wait!"

And the proud young husband was too happy to question further.

All at once they stopped before a lovely little villa, which arose fair and white in the gleaming light of the moon. Trees, and shrubs, and vines grew in profusion all around, and, though leafless now, bade fair to make the grounds a scene of beauty when summer should come again.

The procession parted at the entrance to this lovely abode, forming in two ranks, and Lizette led her husband straight through, and into the villa.

A young maiden in white met them at the threshold; saying, as she saluted them:

"Welcome, Lizette! Welcome, Sidney, to your beautiful home!"

"What does she mean, Lizette?" asked the young man, as he looked about upon the soft bright carpets, and handsome furniture, the beautiful pictures, and many lovely adornments which go to make up a charming home.

Lizette laid her two white hands in her husband's.

"It is my bridal portion—my dowry," she said, softly; and then she told him all her story.

She told him how, when he had written regretting that they could not as yet have a home of their own to go to, she had taken her hoarded treasure which she had earned from the kind prince, and purchased this pretty villa, furnishing it to suit her taste, and adorning it with the beautiful things which she had gathered during her wanderings about the world.

"Last Christmas I was lonely and sad, hungry, cold, homeless, and desolate. Now, how bright and beautiful all the world is to me! Ah! what magic in the dear word, home!" Lizette concluded, with a radiant face.

"And you have done all this!" Sidney said, sadly, almost reproachfully.

"Nay, not I; it is all the gift of the good fairy who gave me my golden-tipped wand, which I shall always prize as my most precious treasure," Lizette said, gaily.

"Now," she added, "we have both home and business, and we will make our fortune together."

A courier now approached the young couple,

and, carrying a beautiful robe—richest fruits of India's far-famed looms—about the fair

bride's shoulders, proclaimed it the "wedding-gift of the prince," and then retired.

The feast was here announced as ready, the guests came pouring in, and the merry-making began.

When morning broke the Christmas bells rang out merrily, and all the world rejoiced; but none were happier, no hearts were more fond and thankful than those within the little villa, the monument of Lizette's perseverance and the prince's kindness, and where for many a year afterwards she continued to wield her golden-tipped wand, and to win for herself both honour and success.

G. S.

THE HATS OUR FATHERS WORE.—The fashion in headgear for men and boys has undergone a great change during the last thirty years. Now caps of cloth are rarely seen except on men in uniform or on foreign arrivals, and the silk hat is worn more than anything else, though the felt hat is usurping the place of both these head coverings, especially for young men in the middle class, except when some state occasion demands the traditional "tall hat," and there are very few wearers of these who know their composition. Once, when the "beaver" hat was actually a beaver skin fashioned into a hat, the name was appropriate. Subsequent improvements reduced the price of "beavers" by changing the material, which became beaver fur—sometimes cheaper fur—attached by a glue or cement to a hat body of felt. Still later the fur was replaced by a silk plush, glued on to a felt form or body. But of late years even the felt body has been discarded for one of coarse muslin or canvas, steeped in the same stiffening liquor used on the felt body—shellac dissolved in alcohol—and receiving the outer covering of silk plush by the melting of the lac glue by means of a hot iron.

"GOING!—GOING!—GONE!"

Life flies so fast the years seem to be gone before one can get used to writing the date at the head of one's letters. 1884 is almost over; and last January it seemed such a comical thing that it should be 1884.

None of us know what date will figure on our own tombstones; but we all fancy that it will be a long, long time yet before the stone-cutter will have the "job." But we cannot part the leaves of an old magazine, or take up an old paper, without being reminded that one who was here a year ago is not here to-day. The world could not do without "him" then or the fashionable intelligence was full of "her"—her dress, her receptions, her "intentions." Now, life goes on very nicely just the same, except to those who have loved and lost.

It is almost too great a pain to endure to read old letters again, or to go to old places. Sometimes one wants to stop the clock, if that would only do any good; there is so much left yet, and old Time is so ready to cut it all down, reaping, as he goes, amongst joys and loves and hopes so pitilessly, and hobbling on so fast!

I never can feel that the world is not meant to be a happy place. I think but for sin and that cruel auctioneer, Death, with his perpetual "going! going! gone!" it would be as nice a place as any one could want. Alas! that is a big "but," which spoils all. We stand powerless and bewildered! What does it all mean? Can we not stop somehow—at least have no more to bear—at least keep the joys and remnant of youth? No, there is no pause, no station except that of the grave, for this express in which we fly past everything—on, on, on!

Surely, if there is an argument needed in favour of believing that there is another world it is that this one has no stopping place. We must be going straight on to Heaven. Nothing else could be worth hurrying so for, not even being through with all our troubles. E. A.

CLIFFE COURT.

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CHAPTER XXVII.

SIR ASCOT CARLYON did not pay his promised visit to his wife, having quite enough to occupy his time in paying off sundry debts with the proceeds of the mortgage-money, and attending Newmarket and other race-meetings, where, as it happened, ill-luck again attended him.

The thought of Alicia in her gloomy prison was not a pleasant one, and he did his best to banish it from his mind; but, in spite of his efforts, it was not to be got rid of so easily. It had an unpleasant way of cropping up at odd moments, which was decidedly inconvenient, and which, like many other inconvenient things, had to be put up with as gracefully as may be.

Then another trouble came upon him—an accident befell his little boy, and he was hastily summoned to Bournemouth, where little Douglas lay insensible.

It seemed that the child had been left alone in the nursery for a few minutes, and during the nurse's absence had somehow contrived to pull the guard from the fire, and set himself alight.

When the servant came running into the room, attracted by his cries, she found him all aflame; and although she managed to extinguish the flames almost immediately, she was not in time to prevent his being fatally injured.

From the first the doctor gave no hope of his recovery, and while Sir Ascot sat at his bedside he debated with himself whether he should send for Alicia or not, and finally decided in the negative. Her presence could not possibly affect the result, and it was probable that when she found her child dead her anger against her husband would be increased tenfold, and there would be nothing to restrain her from acting as she had threatened. Taking all this into consideration, therefore, it was better she should be kept in ignorance of the truth.

He had not long to wait before the end came, and the poor little lad breathed his last while his father watched by his bedside, more sorrow-stricken by the event than might have been expected from a man of his callous nature. Truth to tell, he had cared more for his son than for any other living creature; and when he went, and thus broke the last tie that had bound him to Alicia, the thought of his wife became doubly repugnant to him, and he began to regard her as a hated obstacle in his path to success.

He had seen Lady De Ronbaix for a little while as she passed through London, and the power of her loveliness was certainly not lessened by the thought of her splendid fortune. As much as he could be in love with anyone he was in love with her—that is to say, her beauty was of that type that he most admired, and it had taken captive his senses. How long the infatuation would last was quite another question, but at present he was assuredly under its influence.

"If it were not for Alicia I might marry her!" he muttered to himself, while he was walking home from the sumptuously-furnished apartments the Countess was occupying in one of the best London hotels. "I don't think she would refuse me, and with her fortune I should never know what it was to be pressed for money. I wish my wife would die!"

As time went on the wish became intensified, and it may be, visions of the damp, lonely house, with the marsh lands about it, suggested that, in the case of a person of such delicate health as Alicia, the wish was not unlikely of fulfilment. He broke open the letters sent by Doctor Felton very eagerly; but although they said Lady Carlyon was far from well, there was no hint of her health being such as to give rise to anxiety, and the baronet would throw them into the fire with

an impatient sigh—sometimes a muttered oath.

At last, as October passed away, and November came, it struck him that it would be politic to go down and see her, and, accordingly, he went to Paddington, and took a ticket for the nearest station to Dr. Felton's house.

The afternoon was not a pleasant one, for although it did not rain, the skies were low and threatening, and there was a thunderous closeness in the atmosphere. Perhaps it was owing to this that the baronet was attacked by a bad headache, which induced him to jump out of the train at one of the stations, and go into the refreshment-room for a brandy-and-soda. When he had finished it, and went on to the platform again, he was just in time to see the train steaming gently out of the station.

"What the deuce did you mean by telling me we should stay here five minutes?" he exclaimed, catching hold of an unfortunate porter, whom he recognized as having given him the information referred to.

"So the train did stay five minutes, sir—you was longer in the refreshment-room than you was aware of," responded that individual with a grin; and it was useless to inquire into the truth of his statement, for nothing could alter the fact that Sir Ascot was midway between London and his destination, and that the train had gone.

"What time is the next one?" he inquired, with as much equanimity as he could command.

"Five-thirty-five, sir—two hours' time."

The result of this was that he did not get to his journey's end until rather late in the evening, and then he found himself at a very small station, very dimly lighted, and about as lively as a churchyard.

"Is there any chance of getting a cab?" he inquired of the station-master, who shook his head, and looked dubious.

"I'm afraid not, sir. You see cabs only come from W—when they are ordered, and that's a good two mile away."

"And how far is Dr. Felton's house?"

"The station-master pondered.

"About three mile and a-half, I should say, sir, more or less. But it's a mortal dark road, and very lonely."

"I don't mind that," observed the Baronet, with whom, to do him justice, physical terror was not a failing.

"There's a shorter path through the fields, and across the river," went on the station-master; "it's pretty direct, and I don't think you're likely to lose your way if you follow my directions."

He told him the route as succinctly as possible; and then the baronet started, very much put out at the idea of arriving at Dr. Felton's at so late an hour, but having no other alternative left him.

It was a dark night, there being no moon; what little light there was came from the stars, and these were frequently obscured by drifting clouds; but, as the station-master had said, the road was pretty straight, and there was not much danger of Sir Ascot's missing it.

It happened on that particular day that Lady Carlyon was alone all the afternoon, for Robson had a bad bilious attack, which obliged her to go to bed.

Alicia was rather more restless and excitable than usual, for an event had occurred the week before that had had a considerable effect on her—nothing more or less than the sight of Arline in the garden, where she had gone to recall the dog.

What brought the young girl there Alicia could not imagine, being, of course, ignorant of the events that had taken place since her incarceration; but without waiting to argue out that point, she at once jumped to the conclusion that her friend must be living somewhere in the neighbourhood, and therefore there was a chance of her helping her to escape. It was

with this idea she had waved her handkerchief; but, as we have seen, Arline was unable to understand the signal, and Alicia could not show her face because of the presence of Robson, who had instantly withdrawn her from the window.

Nevertheless, the fancy—for of course she was by no means sure that Arline was not paying a passing visit to the neighbourhood—gave her some encouragement, and she pondered over the means of effecting an escape with more hope than she had hitherto allowed herself to feel.

The continued absence of her husband was an assurance that he had not repented his harsh measures; and, indeed, she knew his character too well to imagine such a thing at all likely until she had given the assurance he required, and that she was firmly resolved not to do.

Of course she was quite aware that the longer she stayed in Dr. Felton's care the fewer became her chances of leaving it. He would naturally be unwilling to part with a well-paying patient; and, on the other hand, her own friends—the few she had—would, by her continued absence, gradually have the remembrance of her effaced from their minds, and leave off any efforts they might at present be making on her behalf.

Her delight when she heard that Robson was unwell, and therefore not able to be with her, was unbounded; but she restrained herself from giving it expression while Dr. Felton was in the room, and he departed, leaving her, as he fancied, as apathetic as usual, and, of course, locking the door after him.

Directly his footsteps died away Alicia sprang up, and rushed to the window, the upper part of which she examined by getting on a chair. Like the lower half, it was frosted; but, unlike that, there were no bars across, for it was so far from the ground that no fears had been entertained of patients attempting to escape, and the bars had been placed at the bottom, less with that idea than the one of preventing their looking out and attracting attention from anyone who might be in the garden.

As has before been mentioned, a huge cedar spread its boughs quite close to the house, and it was this circumstance that had induced Lady Carlyon to fancy she might possibly get away by making use of the branches in aiding her descent.

Her plan was to pull down the upper half of the sash, mount the ledge, and then spring forward and catch hold of a bough. This done, she would have very little difficulty in reaching the ground, for she was light and agile as a young squirrel, and when she was at school had excelled at all gymnastic feats.

That it was a great risk she knew, for if she failed to grasp the cedar there would be nothing to break her fall, and she must come down on the stones below—a distance of over forty feet.

"Never mind!" she exclaimed, under her breath, as this alternative presented itself. "The gods help those who help themselves, and unless I make an effort on my own behalf I may stay here for the rest of my life. Anything—death itself, is better than that!"

She measured the distance with her eyes, and calculated, as well as she could, the amount of strength requisite to accomplish it. Then she sat down and waited until it should grow dark enough to put her plan into execution.

At a little before six a servant came in with some tea, and was proceeding to light the lamp when Lady Carlyon prevented her.

"I have a headache," she said, "and it will rest my eyes to be in the dark."

The attendant made no remark, but obeyed her request, and then left; and Alicia still sat on in the darkness of the winter evening, close to the window, her watch in her lap, and her eyes strained in the endeavour to follow the progress of the hands and see how the minutes slipped by.

They went slowly enough—each one

weighted with the burden of an intolerable anxiety. She heard the stable clock strike seven, and the space between that and the next hour seemed incredible.

The short November afternoon had long before drawn to a close, and now a few stars had come out and shone with a faint, uncertain radiance in the lowering sky.

Alicia watched them anxiously—their light had never been so unwelcome; the darker it was the better her chance of success.

By-and-by she saw a brougham drive up to the door, and then came the sound of Dr. Felton's voice as he stepped into it. He was going out to dinner, and was telling the man what time he expected he should be ready to come back.

Alicia listened with strained ears, and caught the words "eleven o'clock." She breathed a deep sigh of thankfulness. Fate seemed to favour her, for she knew if the master of the house were out the servants would take advantage of his absence, and probably relax the vigilance of their watch on its inmates.

The brougham rolled away, and the garden closed and looked the great iron gates as it passed through. Then came a long interval of silence, and nine o'clock boomed out on the dull, damp air.

Alicia rose at the sound, and listened to make sure no one was about. Then she got on the chair and cautiously lowered the sash. Just as she did so she heard a key grate in the lock, and her heart sank like lead in her bosom as she sprang down and rapidly crossed over to the couch, on which she threw herself. She had not time to close the window, for the noise would have attracted attention, and her plan might thus have been suspected and frustrated.

She had barely time to reach the sofa, and feign slumber, before Robson entered, stumbling as she came in, for it was quite dark, and she had not brought a light with her.

"I am here," said Lady Carlyon, in answer to her inquiry, and when Robson had lighted a candle, she added, "I thought you were ill in bed?"

"Yes, but I felt better and got up. It's struck me that as Dr. Felton was out, and the house all at sixes and sevens, they might forget to bring you your supper," replied the woman, who was most scrupulous in the performance of her duties. "Have you anything to eat?"

"Not since tea."

"As I thought! I suppose you'll have your bread and milk?"

"No, for I am not hungry. I require nothing."

"Then you had better go to bed while I am here to light you," observed Robson, and Alicia had no alternative but to obey. As she was disrobing Robson looked round. "It seems to me there's a draught from somewhere. I can feel the cold air blowing in."

"It is through that pane of glass that was broken the other day," rejoined her mistress, hastily, and in fear lest she might go into the other room and notice the window down. This, however, Robson did not trouble to do, for she was anxious to get away, and directly Lady Carlyon was in bed she withdrew, taking with her the light.

"Thank Heaven, she has gone!" breathed Alicia, as she got up and hastily proceeded to reattire. She did not put on a cloak for fear of its getting in her way, and in lieu of a bonnet she tied a silk scarf round her head, putting a woollen one over her shoulders and tying it at the back, so as to leave her arms free.

The house was very quiet; there was not a sound to be heard within or without, and it was now nearly ten o'clock. She proceeded once more to the window—which was fortunately a wide one—and knelt on the ledge formed by the tops of the two casets, staring a little as she glanced downwards.

"I should break my neck if I were to fall!" she whispered, and for a moment discouraged

held her, and she involuntarily drew back. Only for a moment, though; then she gathered all her energies for one supreme effort. By holding on to the stonework she contrived to stand almost upright on the ledge; she selected the branch to which she would cling, gave one frightened glance round, sent up to Heaven an uttered cry for help, and then sprang forward into the darkness.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Sir Ascot CARLYON was in a bad temper, annoyed at having missed his train, annoyed at the idea of arriving at Dr. Felton's so late at night, doubly annoyed at having to walk so far in the November darkness. He had not even the satisfaction of being able to wear his gun on anyone, but was forced to "purso his watch to keep it warm," and curse the ill-fortune that seemed so persistently to pursue him.

"I should think there never was such an unlucky devil born as myself," he muttered, when, having shown forth a cigar with which to solace the loneliness of his walk, he made the happy discovery that he did not possess the means of getting a light, his finger-box being empty. "There's some man following me behind. I'll wait till he comes up, and ask him for a match."

He had to wait some time, for the man in the rear walked very slowly, and limped as though he had hurt his foot. When he came level with him the baronet saw that he was all, or rather would have been but for an extreme stoop in the shoulders that considerably detracted from his height, and seemed to be the possessor of a long, ragged-looking head. He was leaning some what heavily on his stick, and would have passed on without any salutation had not Sir Ascot stopped him.

"Sorry to trouble you, but if you have some matches about you I'll thank you for one," he said, and the man paused, fumbling about in his waistcoat-pocket, and finally producing a case, from which he took half-a-dozen wax matches, and passed them to the baronet without speaking.

"Thank you," said the latter, striking one, and lighting his cigar as he spoke. "May I, in return, offer you a cigar?"

The man seemed on the point of refusing, and then apparently changed his mind, and took the offered cigar, with a few muttered and half-articulate words of thanks, and went on as quickly as his limp would allow.

Sir Ascot looked after him rather curiously. "A strange customer and up to no good, I should imagine," he soliloquised. "I wonder whether he has any designs on me. If so, I fancy he'll come off second best."

Which was extremely probable, for the baronet never went anywhere without a small revolver, which, at the present moment, was in his breast-pocket, ready for an emergency if such presented itself. Dark and solitary as was the road he did not feel in the least timid, and very soon he had passed his fellow-traveller—whose lameness prevented him from proceeding very quickly—and was half-way towards his destination, having reached the bridge spoken of by the station-master when he was directing him. After crossing it he turned to his left, and kept close to the bank of the river, for this was the shortest cut to the high road, and would bring him out a very little distance from Dr. Felton's house.

It had grown darker than ever now, for clouds had drifted over the sky, obscuring the faint glimmer of the stars, and the light was hardly sufficient to distinguish the outline of the trees, until one grew accustomed to the night shadows. Sir Ascot's eyes were keen as an eagle's, and he had, therefore, no difficulty in keeping to the path; he could even trace the slow, dark stream of the river, as it glided on its way, deep and rippling, to the far-off ocean.

The cigar had proved a solace, and his thoughts drifted into a pleasant channel than heretofore. The remembrance of Lady

DeRoubaix came to him, and he conjured up her image before his mental vision, as she had looked when he saw her last—dressed in heavy, lustreless black silk, trimmed with jet ornaments, that contrasted curiously with the Cliffe diamonds flashing round her arms, throat, and in her beautiful hair.

She was supposed to be in mourning for her uncle, but she had been unable to resist the temptation of wearing the jewels.

Suddenly Sir Ascot came to a standstill. He had heard a sound that was neither the sighing of the wind, or the cry of a bird, but which seemed to him like the quick, half-restrained exclamation of a startled woman; and, on looking round, this idea was confirmed, for he saw a shadow, darker than the rest, crouching down against a bush, as if with the desire of remaining hidden, and this shadow gradually assumed the outlines of a female figure.

"Who are you?" he asked, fancying—not unnaturally—that the woman, whoever she was, might possibly be connected with the man he had previously spoken to, and who had now disappeared.

At the sound of his voice the woman uttered a faint, strangled sort of cry, and started up—not quickly, however, but slowly, and, as it seemed, painfully; and in two strides Sir Ascot had overtaken her, and laid a heavy hand on her shoulder.

"Can't you speak when you are spoken to?" he said, looking round to assure himself there was no one near—for he had begun to fancy his footsteps had been dogged, and that, perhaps, a robbery of his watch, and the few other articles of value about his person, was contemplated. "Surely you are able to answer a civil question?"

If she was able she did not choose to do so, for she maintained a rigid silence, and turned away her head with a low moan when she saw that her efforts to release herself were unavailing.

Still holding her with the one hand, Sir Ascot struck a match with the other, and held it so that it should fall on her features, and then he saw that the woman was none other than his wife!

Yes, it was Alicia, her hands torn and bleeding from her desperate efforts to clutch at the branches of the cedar. Her spring had been only partially successful, for she had not contrived to catch hold of the bough she had calculated on reaching, but had fallen, and caught at one lower down. Now she reached the ground she never afterwards knew. Desperation may have lent her a fictitious strength, by whose aid she managed to climb the high wall that surrounded the gardens and then let herself down on the other side by means of her scarf, which she took from her shoulders and tied to one of the iron spikes.

It was not long enough to reach more than half-way down, so she had to fall the other half, and in doing so she hurt her foot, but this did not prevent her from making her way along the highroad, although each step she took became more painful; and at last, fearful of meeting anyone and being questioned, she turned down the path by the side of the river, where she fancied there would be no chance of seeing another pedestrian.

This idea proved fallacious, for she had not gone very far before she met Sir Ascot, and although the darkness prevented her from recognising him she was in so nervous and excitable a condition that she could not stifle the cry of alarm which involuntarily rose to her lips, and which he heard.

At the sound of his voice a very anguish of despair seized her, knowing as she did that her last chance of escape had gone, and although she tried her best to get from him it was with no real hope of doing so—hope, indeed, had deserted her the moment she knew who he was.

Sir Ascot immediately realised the situation, and his grasp tightened on her arm. "So it is you!" he exclaimed, a ring of

triumph in his voice. "What, if I may ask, brings you in a lonely place like this, at such a time of night?"

She did not reply, but sank down on the wet ground at his feet.

"I think I understand," he went on. "You have contrived to elude Dr. Felton's vigilance, and have escaped without his knowledge. It is lucky for me chance threw you in my way. I must warn the doctor that in future he must take greater care of you."

"Shall you send me back, then?" she asked, in dull, spiritless tones, that were sufficiently indicative of her state of mind.

"Most certainly. Did you think it likely I should take you to the Chase?"

"I did not know. What means have I of telling what you purpose doing with me?"

For some moments neither of them spoke; she, crouching on the damp grass, simply waited, while a strange chaos of thought surged in his brain as he felt how completely she was in his power.

They were quite alone. On the one side the slow, dark river, on the other a small belt of firs, forming part of a plantation, with an undergrowth of brambles between; no sound disturbed the silence of the November night, except the lapping of the waters against some stones on the bank, and in this lonely and unfrequented spot the chances of their meeting anyone were nil.

There was a demon at the baronet's side, whispering in his ear its horrible suggestion, but he made a desperate effort to shake himself free from it. Men do not resign themselves entirely to evil all at once; it is the familiarity with it which finally conquers their last struggles of resistance.

"Look here, Alicia, I'll give you a chance," he said, quickly and feverishly. "Swear to me by all you hold most sacred to say nothing of what has passed between us, and not to interfere with my management of your estates, and I'll let you return to the Chase."

"And how shall you explain my absence?" she asked, raising her head.

"Simply enough. It is already known that you are in a private lunatic asylum, and I shall say you have quite recovered from your attack, and are all right again."

"And all my life I am to remain under the ban of having been insane?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I cannot help that. As things have shaped themselves, it is the least evil to be considered. It will not materially affect you."

"Will it not? I think you are mistaken, for it would shadow the whole of my life; and, moreover, what reason would there be for people to refrain from saying my son had inherited my insanity?"

"Your son, your son—always harping on your son!" exclaimed the Baronet. "That is a point you have no longer to consider, for Douglas is dead."

His voice involuntarily lowered as he made the announcement, and her quick ears instantly detected the change in his tone, which carried with it a conviction this words alone might have failed in doing.

She started to her feet, panting with wildest excitement.

"Dead—Douglas dead?" she cried out. "No, no—it is false—it cannot be true! Heaven would not be so cruel to me."

"It strikes me Heaven troubles itself very little about your affairs," grimly rejoined Sir Ascot; "but, be that as it may, I am not deceiving you this time, for Douglas is really dead. Why won't you believe me?" he added, savagely; "I regret the child's death as well as you—he was my only son—"

He paused a moment, and, strange and inconsistent as it may appear when the man's character is considered, a broken sort of tremble came in his voice. Alicia needed no more to convince her.

"My boy—my pretty boy!" she wailed out in her anguish, throwing up her hands with a gesture of wild despair. She remained silent for some minutes, then turned to him with



["YOU HAVE CONTRIVED TO ELUDE DR. FELTON'S VIGILANCE," SIR ASCOT SAID; "AND HAVE ESCAPED WITHOUT HIS KNOWLEDGE."]

passionate vehemence. "You have done your worst now, are you not satisfied? You have killed my child—for if he had been with me no harm would have befallen him—you have placed me under the stigma of madness for the rest of my life—you have spent my money, and gambled away my estates. What more is there left for you to do?"

He was silent—conscience stricken, it may be—under an accusation that he was powerless to deny. As for Alicia, she was beside herself—mad with pain and despair.

"I was wrong," she added, with a wild laugh; "there is something else in your power, and I know of no reason why you should hesitate at its consummation. My life is in your hands—why don't you take it?"

"Don't tempt me," he muttered, hoarsely; "let me keep my hands free from blood."

"That is a small matter when your soul is already stained with it. The worst form of murder is not that which strangle the breath in your throat, or plunges a knife in your bosom, for then the pain is short-lived, and you are quickly beyond its reach. The cruelty is when you kill all that made existence worth existing for, and condemn your victim to years of terrible remembrance, unredeemed by a vestige of hope, as you have done me. Do you think I value my life? Do you think that if it were not for the thoughts of meeting my Maker with the sin on my soul of taking the life he gave me, I would hesitate for one moment in plunging into that river and ending my misery?"

She had spoken so rapidly and so vehemently, that, as she finished, she reeled backwards from pure exhaustion. There was more light now than there had been a few minutes ago, for some of the clouds had rolled away, and the stars shone out between the rifts, showing their two faces—both deadly pale, both utterly reckless, although reckless in a different fashion.

"It is easy to talk like that, but threatening to drown yourself and doing it are two things. Your courage is not equal to your vaunts," he said, and she turned on him swiftly in reply.

"Do you know another reason that would prevent me besides the sinfulness of the deed?" she demanded. "I will tell you—it is the hope of a just vengeance. I will not give the promise you require, for my whole future life shall be devoted to the task of avenging my wrongs. You have changed my very nature—you have goaded me to desperation, and now you shall reap the fruits of what you have sown, for I swear, before Heaven—" she looked up, solemnly—"that I will not rest, night or day, till I have accomplished my object. You may take me back to Dr. Felton's, you may redouble your vigilance, strengthen your bolts and bars, do what you will. I have escaped before, and I will escape again, to expose your villainy, and punish it as it deserves. Do not despise my words as empty threats—remember, they are not the utterances of a crushed wife, but of a desperate mother—and they will be fulfilled!"

Her voice thrilled with a certain prophetic vibration that it is impossible to describe, and Sir Ascot, in spite of himself, was impressed by it. Bolder as he was he felt that she fully meant every syllable she uttered, and more than that—she would verify her own faith by carrying them into effect.

The demon at his side hissed louder than ever, and his resistance grew fainter and fainter with each moment. He took a step forward, and seized her arm—obeying an involuntary impulse—and she struggled to free herself from the contamination of so hated a touch.

In the struggle the distance between where they stood and the river grew less, and as Sir Ascot looked down he found they were quite close to the bank.

Suddenly there rang out on the heavy air the scream of a woman in mortal peril,

followed by a dull splash in the water. Then there was silence—complete, terrible.

The river rolled on, carrying its dark secret down to the ocean, and a man rushed from its bank into the blackness of the void beyond, branded with the mark that no repentance could ever wash out—that the coming years were powerless to efface—the awful brand that was seared on the brow of Cain, when his brother's blood called out for vengeance!

(To be continued.)

GIRLS.—In France young girls go, after church on Sundays, to the public promenade to show their little new shoes. Their eyes are bent on the ground, they walk with little jerky steps; it is a little exhibition. Mamma whispers on either side, "My daughter will have a hundred thousand francs for her dot." These public Sunday walks in country towns always remind us of a fair at which the mothers trot out their daughters for inspection. No long, free, health-giving country-walks there. No; the roads are muddy and the damp would penetrate the little delicate boots; and the pointed heels, intelligently fixed almost in the centre of the sole, are not calculated to encourage walking; besides, who would there be to notice the silk dresses and fifty-franc hats? Now look at the young English girl, with her hair knotted simply on her neck; she wears a sixpenny straw hat, which she has turned up on one side; a cotton dress, and strong-soled low-heeled boots. Racket in hand she sets out with some young fellows and a troop of other girls as simply dressed as herself to go to some distant field to play a game of lawn-tennis. Not one mamma in the party! On her return home she devours her dinner without shame. What she values above gracefulness is health. It is no compliment to say to an English girl, "You eat like a little bird;" it would be a reproach.



["I AM SO GLAD, NORMAN," SAYS ETHEL, GENTLY. "I KNEW ALL WOULD BE WELL IN THE END."]

NOVELLETTE.]

LOVE'S SILKEN SHIELD.

CHAPTER I.

"Oh, mother dear, it is so hard to lose you, and I have prayed night and day that you might be spared to me," says Ethel Crombie, striving with supreme effort to stifle the sobs that are nearly choking her, lest they should disturb the peaceful calm of her dying mother.

"It is well, dear, I am called; I am almost happy; life has been a burden for such a dreary time for you, my precious child."

"Do not say that, mother; you can never know what happiness it is to be near you, and necessary to your comfort. Oh, that I could keep you always near me to minister to you, watch over you as you did me so tenderly when I was a little helpless creature." The girl bows her head in bitter grief on the snowy coverlet beside the pale, fragile woman whose wan face is lighted up with a bright, celestial expression, as if the angels are in close communion with the fast-ebbing, gentle, spirit which is longing to escape from its earthly bondage.

"Be brave, my dearest one," Mrs. Crombie says, smiling angelically into the tear-dimmed face, and clasping the girl's hand lovingly. "What I want to impress upon you is to go to your great uncle immediately that I—but there, you know what I mean; he will then be the only living relative left you, and I shall be so happy in my heavenly home to know you are provided for."

"Perhaps he will not receive me, mother. I have always heard you say he was a hard, stern man—almost a miser," she replies, meekly.

"Do not fear to go. I have left you a letter that he will not disregard; promise me solemnly you will obey my last wishes, Ethel."

"I promise, mother," she sobs, unable to control her anguish as she realizes the parting is so cruelly near, when her gentle, loving mother will pass out of her life.

The soft evening shadows steal into the chamber, casting tender reflections around the little, bowed head that is crowned by masses of auburn hair with just that rich reddish tinge painters of the old school loved to portray their heroines.

Her long fringed lashes are heavy with tears and many vigils, but they cannot disguise the beauty of her dark eyes, which glitter like soft golden sparks, notwithstanding their heavy burden.

She looks like a flower whose stem is weighed down by an excess of summer rain or heavy dews.

The last traces of day are fast vanishing, the young moon begins to pour forth light into the silent chamber, shedding a kind of halo over the invalid's face as she lays one slim wasted hand in the girl's, as if loth to part from her even in sleep.

A strange, sad murmuring rises from time to time from the lindens as the faint breeze stirs their leaves, just as if they were trying to sympathise with the sad little watcher; and now the whole sky is sown with stars that gleam down through the open casement bright and sparkling.

"Oh, wondrous stars, so mysterious and grand!" murmurs Ethel. "Are you messengers of hope? or do you command my dear one to come up and live in your palaces. Will you not spare her to me? I am very lonely, and she is all I have on earth!"

"What were you saying, Ethel?" says her mother, faintly, waking out of a fitful sleep.

"I was asking the stars to spare you to me," she returns, softly. "You are all I possess; what will life be to me when your dear presence is gone, mother dear?"

"Peaceful I trust, my child. I shall watch over you and plead to the angels to intercede

for my earthly treasure, my spirit will hover around you always. Rest assured that Our Father who thinks fit to call me away from your side will comfort and protect my child—His child then, because you will be deprived of your earthly protectors. Now sing me one of our favourite hymns, dearest; perhaps I could sleep, I feel strangely drowsy."

Presently the room echoes with Ethel's soft girlish voice, so full of sweet pathos, as she nerves herself to comply with her mother's request. She sings such soul-inspiring words of comfort and joy—each verse a prayer of praise—that the little humble room becomes a temple of glory, and the singer, in her loose, white robes, seems an angel just come to visit this weary earth of ours.

At last she finishes her praises as she sees the dear one is slumbering, and smoothing with tender care the pillows, she sits watching on in the still night till her sunny head droops gradually down beside the sleeper, and she passes into the land of dreams, and fancies she is in a kingdom of perpetual sunshine and joy, where there is no partings or sorrow; bars laden with precious stones are playing divine music; flowers are blooming everywhere, and fountains of sparkling gems send up showers of pearls with the magic water spray, and she hears a loud, clear voice say,—

"Welcome, dear sister, to the waters of life," and then all is a blank.

The languid balmy air trembles at times like a sheet of water troubled by a branch of a tree suddenly falling on it; all is slumbrous with a soft drowsiness; all things seem to stretch towards the heavens, to dilate; to wait in stillness, as if in anticipation of some great event.

It is the angels calling a tired spirit to their regions of eternal bliss, to speed the weary way through the shadows as it takes its flight to Heaven.

When the dawn breaks into the chamber it finds an orphan lying beside her dead

mother, hand clasped in hand; one warm with life's tumult, the other cold and still, stricken by the iciness of death.

A crimson rose droops through the window, its straight stem bent as if in sympathy with the young mourner. A great drop of night-dew shines with a heavy lustre in its depths, like a tear shed over departed joys.

At last Ethel awakes to find the gentle spirit fled, and seeing the rose she gathers it reverently and places it on her mother's bosom, saying,—

"Sweet, darling mother, even the roses weep for you," and in a very abandon of grief and hopeless despair she casts herself on her knees beside the bed and sobbively heart-breaking, racking tears that have been lying dormant for days, kept in check by the force of love, duty, and a powerful self-control.

There she is found, faint and exhausted, by the good woman of the house when she enters with a tray laden with tea and toast for two, little dreaming that such a scene had been the great spirit army.

A week has passed, and Mrs. Gombie lays peacefully beneath a drooping willow; and poor Ethel, looking so like a white lily in her black dress, is busy planting simple flowers on the fresh mound, assisted by Norman Stanton, her old companion and school-fellow, and great favourite of the dear dead mother.

"And you really mean to go to London, Ethel?" he asks gently.

"I must," she replies; "I promised mother; but—oh how crushed it all seems to leave this dear old place where I have been so happy, and to leave her," the sunny eyes fill with tears.

"But I only been gifted with half the talent I have boasted about you need never have left your old home," he says, brokenly. "Fool that I have been to believe the flattering tongues of my too partial friends."

"Do not be so cast down," she pleads, placing her hand in his. The mere touch of those rosy warm fingers bring a light into his eyes of peace and calm joy, and his voice becomes deeper and steadier as he replies,—

"Dear Ethel, will you wait for me till I have mounted the ladder? It is a steep and slippery one, and many weary years may pass before I may ever be able to claim you. Perhaps the goal may never be reached even, and then your bright young life would be sacrificed to the mad selfishness of a dreamer."

"Not so, Norman," she says, encouragingly. "You are no dreamer; you have talents of no ordinary kind. I feel it, I am sure of it. Mother said so, and our good rector, too, and he is a judge; besides, all you have sent to London have been accepted, none have been rejected."

"But what starvation prices they have rewarded my labour with! May it be not enough to keep my poor old mother, much less a wife."

"There, you will be so deponding," she says, chidingly; "the world wasn't made in a day by the Great Master of the universe. Then how can you expect to earn as much as artists who have spent years in their profession? Patience, dear Norman; keep working on at your task, which you must confess you love. Fortune will reward your perseverance and labour, rest assured."

"Sweet comforter!" he replies. "I should be indeed a coward if I turned back now with your words of hope and wisdom to inspire me. Ever since your dear mother died, and I knew how cruelly alone you were left to struggle, it has wrung my heart-strings nearly to reflect upon my complete powerlessness to gather you to my breast and call you by that dream, title of my soul—wife. You know how dearly I love you, sweet Ethel, and that she sanctioned my hopes and our future union."

"But I shall not be friendless," she urges, coaxingly. "My great-uncle has written to say he will receive me. The letter might have been a little kinder in its tone; but, there,

we must be grateful for small mercies, Norman."

They have gained the little wicket gate; and Heaven's acre, so calm and peaceful, is bathed in a glorious mist this glorious summer afternoon.

The quaint little village is glittering in the sun-like jewels, and over the hills the cloudlets scatter like crumpled rose-leaves as they come drifting across the sun's pathway.

They make a handsome couple as they stroll on side by side, she with the light of the azure sky in her eyes, and the soft ether breeze lifting her hair and blowing it about her sweet face, looking up into his with an earnest, rapt expression in her beautiful eyes.

Norman Stanton, tall, straight as an arrow, but slight, with dreamy face and great, wondering, thoughtful eyes, broad, high forehead and delicate mouth that many a beauty might envy, so beautifully fine and out of tune outlines, a thought weak, perhaps, that still marvellously attractive, especially to women. The face is evidently that of a dreamer, a poet, a man who would wear his life out to win fame, not for fame's sake, as the passionate yearning to create his ideal conveys that should live for all ages.

"His was the soul's craving for perfection in his beloved art, which up to now has only barely kept body and soul together, but that he never thought seriously about. Till death snatched Mrs. Gombie away he had dwelt in a delightful paradise of hope, firmly believing success would crown his efforts, and leave him free to claim his bride."

"Oh! the fancies I fondly hoped to lay at your feet," he says. "If you only knew how I have looked forward to the day when you would have heard my name spoken of by the great world as Norman Stanton the Royal Academician. These have been my dreams."

"Not dreams, dear Norman, but realities," she says, earnestly. "You are going to commence your career in London, so am I. Everyone says that it is the Eldorado where people of talent can get friends to help them on; besides, you will be able to go about, and perhaps get higher prices for your pictures; here you are compelled to take what the dealer chooses to send or go without."

"There is something in that," he says, brightening up; "but what is worrying me so much is to know that our meetings will be stopped, and my spirits will sink and hope die when your dear presence is denied me. You are my inspiration; if I can only see you, be near you, my nature becomes refreshed, and such grand conceptions enter my imagination that would, I feel convinced, immortalize my humble name."

"And will yet—who knows! Perhaps my uncle may not be so cold and hard as his letter makes him out; it will be strange if I cannot find a warm spot in his heart. If I do we may meet in London at times, though, of course, not so frequently as we have in our dear old home. Surely he will not keep poor me a prisoner."

"That he shall never do, my darling. I will release you from bondage at any moment; only promise me you will not stay if he is unkind."

"I promise; but never fear he is not an ogre, surely; and I am no timid little maid to be afraid of dungeons and dark rooms inhabited by spiders, beetles, and rats. Oh, no," looking up with a flash of her old girlish witching smiles; "I'll charm the giant in his castle and subdue him by love; he must be very lonely with no one to care for him. I begin to feel anxious to see him. Who knows I may prove a comfort to him? He is the only person living, dear mother told me, to whom I can claim kinship. Only fancy, this time tomorrow I shall be on my way. I wonder how he will welcome me? Well, well, time will tell; but here we are, close to your cottage, Norman; and here is your dear old mother coming towards us. See! she is walking quite fast."

"Truants, where have you been?" says the old lady, kissing Ethel, tenderly. "I have been watching for a sight of you both for an hour or more. See, my son, here is a letter bearing the London postmark; perhaps it's good news."

Hastily opening it, Norman says, after reading the contents,—

"It is an offer from a gentleman who has seen my pictures to paint twelve. What luck! Oh, Ethel, can it be true?" this excitedly.

"Why not? What did I say a few minutes ago? Fortune is sure to be yours if you will only believe in yourself."

"Hurrah!" he exclaims, throwing up his cap in a wild fit of ecstasy. "All is well, another dear; we will ride in our carriage—no three yet, and my pictures shall grace the walls of a grateful nation."

The mercenary nature of Norman was aroused from its torpor, and his fancy flew to flights of power, greatness, and unbounded success in a few brief moments, as it frequently does to imaginative natures. They are easily cast down or up—sanguine one minute, at the lowest depths of despair another.

"I am so glad, Norman," says Ethel, gently. "I know all would be well in the end."

"Wise little gipsy," he returns, smiling fondly. "Believe you are a witch."

"Instead of chatting about witches and other nonsense, Norman, I advise you to remember she is waiting, and it is Ethel's last evening, and the cakes are getting cold, and so is the tea."

"I beg your pardon, ladies," he replies. "The fact is, I was over-elated with the good news. Am I forgiven, darling?" this softly, looking down into the sunny face with a joyous smile. "Remember, if I err it is over excitement at my good fortune, which I only prize for your sweet sake."

"I know it, Norman, so pardon is granted over and over again," placing her hand in his confidently.

The simple tea-table is spread with fruit, flowers, and flaky cakes hot from the oven; and real Devonshire junket and clotted cream; fresh crisp lettuce and bright knobby radishes lay in tempting heaps on the snowy cloth; all looks fresh, sweet and rural—a feast for the weary city toiler's eyes to rest upon, as well as the inner man's enjoyment.

A sigh escapes Ethel as she thinks of the parting so near now of these dear old friends, and wonders what kind of tea-tables they have in London, that great world of turmoil, and if they have cream and junket and wild-wood flowers, till her head becomes dizzy, and the pretty eyes become suffused with wistful tears, which she strives hard to hide with her occupation lest she should mar the peaceful joy which has fallen over her lover, that horn of revived hopes and dreams of future success.

With a loving, pitying humanity brightening everything she diffuses a cheery warmth, like gleams of summer sunshine after a fierce storm, making the humble room a veritable paradise to her two worshippers, for Mrs. Stanton loves her in her fashion as dearly as her son.

CHAPTER II.

"Have you got the room ready, Mrs. Snod, for this niece of mine?"

"Yes, sir, the front attic; I thought it would be the best for the occasion."

"Quite right; it would never do to put grand notions into the head of a silly child of a girl who is only a beggar."

"That's what I thought, sir," replies the oily housekeeper, who humours her master's every croaker, looking forward to the main point, which is a handsome legacy, by feigning implicit obedience to his slightest wish.

"Pardon me for presuming to mention it, but couldn't you have refused to receive her?—she is sure to be a great worry to you."

"That may be, Snod, but her mother was my favourite niece and the best of the whole

husk; if she hadn't gone and married a young jackanapes (of a red coat against my will she would have been my heiress. She is dead, and her letter brings back somehow the old days when she would place her little hand in mine and drag me into the woods, and coax me to pick nuts and blackberries on the bushes she couldn't reach; but there, I am running on like an old fool. Fought I wish she was not coming. Snod; she will upset all my comfort, I expect."

"Dear the jade!" grumbles Penelope Snod, as she leaves the room. "No good will follow her coming. I'll be bound. We were jogging along all right and comfortable enough till this letter came to upset everything. I hate girls, they are regular prying peacocks, useless, vain creatures; goodness knows what the house will be like when she comes."

"So you are Ethel Crombie. Well, you are welcome," touching her forehead with his lips and looking with a cold, curious expression at the sweet face.

"I am so pleased to come, uncle," she says, smilingly. "You are my only living relative now," this as she suddenly clasps her white, rounded arms around his neck, and kisses the old parchment lips with her dewy, warm young ones, bringing to his face a glow of human feeling that has been a stranger for many a year.

"Just like your mother, full of impulse and nonsense," he says, moodily; "but perhaps you are tired. I am not a lady's man, so don't know what girls require, but Mrs. Snod does," ringing the bell vigorously.

"Why were you not here to receive my niece?" the old gentleman says, brusquely; "see to her at once, she is tired after her journey."

"Certainly sir," says the sour-visaged matron, meekly. "I didn't even know she had arrived."

"Well you see it's an assured fact now, don't you?" grumbles the master of the house, as Ethel follows the housekeeper out of the room.

"Yes I do," thinks Penelope, "to my cost; you are as huffy and disagreeable as possible. I wish the mix at Hanover before she had stepped her foot in here; all went as smooth as glass, and now everything is turned topsy-turvy."

"What a funny old place this is!" exclaims Ethel, as she throws her crape hat on the bed, and surveys her chamber, where everything is heavy and ponderous, so different to her little simple chamber in her old home, where snowy dimity draped her little bed, and daisies, jasmine and roses climbed into her window. "Have you no flowers here in London, Mrs. Snod?"

"Flowers! Certainly not, miss; we don't flitter our time in such rubbish. We have enough to do to attend to our duties," returns that personage, grimly.

"Do you mean that nobody gathers them?" says Ethel, simply.

"I mean that we don't grow such rubbish," snaps Penelope.

"Then I pity you London people," replies the girl, as she brushes the masses of rippling hair and replats it into a neat coil behind her dainty head. "You need not wait; I can manage for myself, thank you."

"Anyone would think she was some grand lady, with her high and mighty airs and graces," mutters the housekeeper, as she makes her way out of the room.

"Where did you get those flowers?" "I bought them, uncle; you are not angry with me, but I do love anything that reminds me of dear Devonshire," returns Ethel, meekly.

"If they please you they don't hurt me," he says, frigidly; "but I can't see the use of them, they seem to me a waste of money; and I am not well enough off to afford useless trifles."

"Is that really so, uncle?" replies Ethel. "If I thought you were poor I would not have

spent the money on them, much as I love them."

"I don't mean that," he says. "I wish to fix on your mind the necessity of economy; no wasteful expenditure is my motto. Now these things rot, there is no return; I want a decent percentage for my outlay at any rate."

"But what can give a greater return than these dear flowers that speak of brightness, joy, and Heaven's love?" she replies, softly. "Just smell the fragrance of this rose, uncle!" as she takes one out of the vase and holds it up close to him with a radiant smile on her face, and the sunlight casting golden beams on her head.

"Power—money, are the real flowers of this world, child."

"But if you don't possess either, why not welcome these, uncle? They cost but a trifle, and come straight from Heaven's gates."

"You talk like a foolish girl; you know nothing of the world. When I say I am poor I mean that I am not so rich as I should wish to be. Wealth and poverty are comparative things."

"I am almost glad to know you are not rich," she returns, artlessly, "because I can compensate you for riches by making you happy; affection is a hardy plant, and as the poet says flourishes in a poor soil, so I'll be your flower, or rather money-bag, uncle, if you will let me."

"What can you see in me to waste your young life upon?" he answers, grimly. "Take my word, child, if you want to be really happy look after the pence, the pounds will take care of themselves. Self is the motto; every man for himself."

"And Heaven for us all, uncle," she adds, mischievously, noticing a wistful, disconcerted expression in the old man's face as he meets her frank, smiling eyes; "surely you don't wish me to be selfish and care only for myself; that would be treason to you who are so kind to me."

"Kind, child? What have I done to merit that praise?" he says, in a puzzled, incredulous voice.

"Received me in your home, and made me welcome—I that was friendless; surely that is kindness, uncle?"

"You are a strange girl," he remarks, patting the little head, a thing he had never done before. "Run away, I have to go to the City now."

"Let me help you on with your coat," running out into the hall, and with deft hands helping him on with it, and brushing it carefully, as if she had been a straitened valet.

"Tidy little thing, active and useful, worth a dozen of those snails of Snods," he mutters, as he goes down the steps; "house looks more comfortable, too, but I must instil the necessity of economy. She is inclined to be lavish; that will never do."

"Good gracious, miss, you must not think of meddling with those cabinets; they are filled with valuables, and the master will go out of his mind if you touch his antics, as he calls them," says Mrs. Snod one morning, as she enters the once dull, heavy-looking drawing-room, where Ethel is busily engaged in making it shipshape, as she calls it.

The costly inlaid cabinets are ranged round the room, and white curtains are hanging from the windows, confined by rose-coloured ribbons; the dingy holland covers are removed from the chairs, and bright-bound books are lying carelessly on the tables, and, to crown all, she is engaged dusting costly articles of vertu, which she in the utmost flight of her imagination could never dream of the value.

"What on earth is the use of them hidden away among dust and spiders. Mrs. Snod? Surely uncle will be glad to see them arranged neatly!"

"That remains to be seen," returns the dame, sourly. "I only know what his orders are, and it's more than I dare do to disobey them."

"Oh, dear Lord, dear! it's too late to alter it now," returns poor Ethel, looking rather crestfallen, it must be confessed. "I cannot put the dust back on them, that's certain, so I must face it out now; so as I stand a chance of a good wiggling I'll finish my furnishing up, and hang those lovely pictures lying there in a heap. I may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb."

"If you do you will repent it," retorts Penelope, harshly. "I wouldn't be in your shoes when the master comes home," flouncing out of the room viciously.

"Oh! all the disagreeable old things she's the head" says Ethel, going on with her dusting, and looking with intense admiration on the grand works of art that lay before her—masterpieces of Rubens, Vandyck, and Raffaele; then she comes across some delicious pieces of landscape and woodland scenery, and she almost fancies she can recognise some of the Devonshire scenery.

"Surely that is the old mill and the hollow where I used to creep through to get to the nuts; but, there, it cannot be. I suppose country life is similar in pictures. How lovely the room will look when these are all hung! But how is it that uncle is so poor, with all these valuable things? Why don't he sell them? I am sure they would fetch a lot of money."

Simple as she is, she can perceive that the things are of considerable value.

"How I should like Norman to see some of these lovely pictures; but, there, time is flying, and I must make haste, or I shall not be in time to meet him," taking a last look at the room, and smiling with satisfaction at the transformation.

"My darling, I thought you were never coming," whispers Norman, as he catches the little black-gloved hand in his and presses it tenderly.

"Fie, sir, I am only a few minutes late," she replies, with a little more that makes her irresistible.

"But minutes are precious to me," he says, "since they are all I have to live upon now. Do you know that I count them as a miser does his gold, Ethel?"

"I only know you are a foolish boy," she returns, naively. "But tell me, Norman; how are you getting on?" looking up with tender solicitude into the haggard young face, and trying to meet his dark eyes that are encircled with rims grey as coming midnight, suggestive of late hours or prolonged vigils.

"Capitally," he returns, lightly. "You see, London is a delightful place, so full of pleasure and good fellows, that one doesn't find time for much earnest work; but I am especially fortunate. I always have a ready sale for my pictures the moment they are finished; in fact, I sometimes draw my cheque before. Splendid old gentleman, plenty of money."

"But if he pays you well, dear Norman, why the necessity?" she asks, simply.

"Well, you see, town life is so very different to country," he says, quickly. "An artist has claims upon him, too; he has to mix out a good deal in the world, and among Bohemians who are fond of pleasure, you know, and spend money freely."

"But how is that consistent with study and hard work?" she says, trisely. "You had very little time to spare in your old home—how is it possible to be so lavish here in London?"

"My little father-confessor," he returns, laughing. "you cannot enter into the life of a struggling painter, who must make friends, and see life in all its phases to become perfect in his art."

"Well, all that may be right, Mr. Wiseacre, but what time do you find to paint, if you are engaged among friends and society in general?" she says, smiling.

"Oh, that comes right. I make time and get through my commissions somehow."

"Make time and get through my commissions somehow," she muses with a little sigh, as she seats herself on a chair by the Serpentine, which he has placed for her with tender

care. Then flinging himself on the emerald carpet at her feet, he says,—

"May I have a cigar, darling? This puts me in mind of the old days in Devonshire, and a whiff will complete the illusion."

"Yes, Norman, you have my consent if you will look up in your old confiding way into my eyes."

"There, sweetheart, will that suit you?" gazing earnestly and tenderly into the sweet, anxious face.

"Yes. Well, now tell me how dear mammy is, and all the news. I haven't seen you for a fortnight, so you ought to be overflowing with a perfect budget."

"Mine is very prosy, my darling; the dear old mater is quite hearty and well, and I you see at your feet."

"Is that all?"

"What more would you have?" playfully.

"A deal, sir," coaxingly.

"Then I will tell you how I have longed for this happy day, and—"

"I don't mean that," hesitatingly. "I mean about yourself."

"Am I not talking about myself?" interrupting her; "of my yearning love and craving to be near you? Surely you will not say that is not about your humble servant. Am I not at your feet as a true knight should be, listening to your dear, sweet voice, that to me is music so lovely that other sounds would fall dead upon my senses?"

"Flatterer, you will make me vain and silly. I declare I won't listen to you."

"What will you do, Ethel? Shut up your pretty ears?"

"No; run away from you, sir."

"Then I am vanquished quite, and will obey you implicitly in everything—anything, rather than lose you," he replies, bantering. "How I wish I could claim you now; life would be so complete, then," he adds, in a rather sad tone. "Is he kind to you?"

"Whom? My uncle? Oh, yes, very; I am almost happy."

"And the housekeeper?" he persists.

"Oh! she is of a crabby nature, but we do not meet more than we can help. She is so cold and huffy in her manner that I am sure she would turn milk without rennet. But I fancy even she has a soft spot in her heart. I fancy she has for uncle; she is always pinching and scolding to save his purse."

"Is he poor, Ethel? If he is, why should you not share my humble home? I would work," and an inspired light, straight from his soul, illumines his eyes at the ecstatic thought, "like a nigger if I had your dear smile of approval and love to cheer me on."

"Do you not already possess both, Norman?"

"Yes, thank Heaven," he says, fervently, "I do; but what I mean is, that if you were my very own, my sweet wife, things would be so different. I should have one goal, one constant, bright gleam of light and hope to light me on my dreary, up-hill journey, and fame—yes, I feel it would crown my efforts with you by my side. Oh! my darling, my heart's love, be brave, link your fate with mine; leave this old man, he does not love you, he only tolerates you because you are a ray of sunshine in his home. Think what your dear presence would be to me—sunlight, inspiration, renewed efforts, unceasing struggles up the ladder to fame and fortune, perhaps salvation."

"Cease, dear Norman," she says, trying to be calm, but her lips are quivering with love and its sweet emotions, raised by his impassioned words and looks that are now searching into her pretty, shy eyes as if he would, by his love, force a yea from the shy, trembling gates of coral; "I cannot be so ungrateful as to leave uncle so soon; besides, I should not be all you perhaps think. Be patient, Norman; indeed it is best."

"If you only knew how it would save me," he says, almost brokenly, "you would not be so cold," and his words somehow fill her with an unknown dread. "I am like a straw cast upon a mad, surging whirlpool; I have tried

to stem the current, but have failed," tossing his cigar into the waters, among the pure white lilies, making it hiss in its sudden contact with the water.

"Oh, Norman, what do you mean?" she says, sadly; "do not keep any sorrow from me; let me share it as we did in the dear old times when I was a foolish little girl, and you a strong, big boy, whose arm always supported me when dired with nutting, or wandering about the woods. You are in trouble perhaps not well," stroking his slender, well-shaped hand affectionately. "Do not send me away unhappy; let me be your little comforter."

"Oh, merciful Heaven! would that I dared tell her all, and turn to her innocent heart for consolation and support! All might then be well; but, no, I should die of shame! Her eyes, pure as the limpid stream that runs down the hills in Devon, would haunt me with their grief and pity—perhaps loathing, if she but knew that my nights are spent with gamblers, and that wine is the only solace left to the unfortunate, the poor besotted wretch who casts his all—almost his eternal hopes—upon the cast of a die."

"Why do you not answer me, dear?" she pleads. "See, I am all ready to listen, and to render you my poor advice and sympathy. Do not be cruel."

"Cruel, sweetheart? That were impossible, though, I admit, I may be guilty of being cruel to be kind, but not intentionally. Come, do not look at me like that, with such inquiring, wistful eyes. I assure you that I am as happy as the veritable sandboy; but when are you coming to see the mater? You can have no idea how she talks about you, and sweeps and garnishes the parlour every day, and renews the few humble flowers that she gets at some greengrocer's close by. 'Dear little Ethel! she will, perhaps, come to-day,' is her daily prayer, 'and even these few simple flowers will please her.'"

"Dear old mammy!" she says, fondly, "how loving she is! Tell her that I shall come, perhaps, next week, and spend a long day with her. Uncle expects some old lord either Tuesday or Wednesday upon some important business. Just fancy, Norman, a real live lord!"

"And you are going to run away without taking even a peep at such a curiosity?"

"Certainly, I mean to escape that day to Kensington. I should feel downright afraid to even look at him. Shouldn't you?"

"I cannot say so much as that," he says, smiling, "for I come across lords, earls, and other big personages frequently."

"You do?" opening wide her wondering eyes. "Are they very much different to other men?"

"Not in my eyes, darling. They appear sometimes inferior to many in all that makes a true gentleman."

"How very dreadful," she says seriously. "I thought they were generally high and noble in nature as they are in exalted station, at least I pictured them so. I wouldn't meet this lord next week for the world. He would laugh when he was alone at the foolish little country girl and her *gaucheries*."

"Sweet little innocent, you would be a wild fresh flower to him, a gem so pure and unalloyed that admiration would fill his mind. How little you know your own charms! But, there, by all means leave this old fogey of a lord to entertain himself. You are too precious to waste your sweetness on him. I will wait for you here at the old trying place, and bear you in triumph to the mater, and then leave you with her for two whole hours while I go to my work, and then I shall claim you, and we will roam in these quaint old gardens, and imagine ourselves in the woods."

"But where are the nuts, sir, and the wild anemones and flowers?"

"You shall be the flowers and I will supply the nuts."

So they chat on till time tells the lovers that their happy bliss is over, and he saunters towards Bloomsbury square, delighted at the long walk, for all is sweet and radiant to him, because she is by his side. The shabby streets, and numerous urchins, and unkempt figures of women slouching into gin-palaces, some with babies in their arms, are not heeded by him. He is walking in a kind of enchanting dream, where flowers and fragrant perfumes fill the air.

But, alas! all these fatally-sweet moments are too bright. They are delusive, evanescent, fixing on the mind in days of dearth and loneliness their bliss with a bitterness like gall, because they can never come again in their whole joy and freshness.

(To be concluded in our next.)

BERTA.

The expression *berta* is a household word in Italy for gossip and small jokes; *far la berta* and *dar la berta* mean to play off a practical joke or make a fool of anyone. Professor Filippo Mori, in the *Gionedi*, gives, says a writer in a contemporary, the following Tuscan legend for the origin of the expression:—

There was a peasant named Campriano who was condemned to death after this manner: he was to be tied in a sack and thrown into the sea. As the executioners were carrying him bound toward the shore they were overtaken by brigands, who thought there must be some great treasure in the sack. The executioners ran away frightened, and the brigands opened the sack. When they found only a man in it they were so disappointed that they would have killed him.

"How did you get put into the sack?" first asked one of them.

"I was put in the sack," he replied, with great cunning, "because I refused what other men would reckon great good fortune. The two men who saw running away are two great barons, who were commissioned to fetch me and take me by force to the King of Franconia, who has determined I shall marry his daughter Berta. Before now he has sent ambassadors to beg me to come and marry her; but I refused, showing them that I have always lived as a countryman, and should be miserable at court."

"And why is he, a king, so anxious that you, a countryman, should marry his daughter?" inquired the brigand, shrewdly.

"Because," replied the peasant, equal to the occasion, "he has learnt from his oracle that unless his daughter marries a countryman he will lose his crown, and all the country will go to wrack and ruin. So now he sent these two great barons to take me to him by force, and they were taking me to the shore, where a great ship awaits us in which I am to be embarked."

"You are foolish, indeed, to complain of such good fortune!" answered the brigand.

"Will you change places with me?" asked Campriano.

"Gladly enough," replied the brigand.

"Then I'll give you leave to do so, said Campriano, "on condition that you promise to remember me when you come into possession of your kingdom; for whose marriage Berta will be king of all Franconia."

"Yes, yes—I won't forget you!" answered the brigand, fairly caught by the bait. "But make haste and let me get into the sack before those great barons come back, lest they should discover our exchange."

Campriano got out readily enough, and walked away as soon as he had made fast the mouth of the sack; and, the other brigands having gone away, too, the executioners came back stealthily. Finding the coast clear, and the sack looking as they had left it, they ran off with it again, and plunged it into the sea with all expedition before any other hindrance might occur.

CHRISTMAS LEGENDS AND TRADITIONS.

"England was Merry England, when
Old Christmas brought his sports again;
'Twas Christmas broached the mightiest ale,
'Twas Christmas told the merriest tale;
A Christmas gambol oft could cheer
The poor man's heart through half the year."
—SCOTT.

It is hardly possible to realise in this prosaic age what Christmas was in the olden times. Now two or three days at the utmost suffice to pay our respects and complete our rejoicings for the Nativity; but amongst our forefathers, and, indeed, in most Christian countries, it was looked upon as the festival of the year; and England has always been celebrated for its observance, and perhaps next has come Germany. Some of our early Sovereigns were very lavish in their state feasts—for example, in 1398, Richard II. kept his Christmas at Eltham, when 200 tons of wine and 2,000 oxen were consumed. At the festivities the miracle plays were performed; in later days, ordinary plays, some of Shakespeare's and Ben Jonson's having been so produced.

On all these merry-makings reference was made to the various legends and traditions with which the festival is surrounded, some of which have lived down to the present day, and some of which have died away, or are to be found only in the remotest country districts.

One of the first traditions which has been called into question is the date of the celebration, the 25th December. The exact date of the birth of our Lord has long been a matter of keen dispute among the learned; and it has been generally agreed that it could not have been on the date at present given to it, for several reasons—one of the most important being that the shepherds could not have been watching their flocks in the fields at night, at such a time, for in the Holy Land it is the very heart of the rainy season.

Sir Isaac Newton, about whose orthodoxy there could be no question whatever, has attempted to account for the choice, by arguing that it is merely symbolical—one of the cardinal points of the year, the winter solstice being chosen for this, as other points were for other festivals. Whatever be the truth of the matter, it is unquestionable that the day was fixed in the very earliest ages of the Church, and has been consistently adhered to ever since.

Some writers would make out that our Christmas is simply an adaptation of a heathen festival held about this time by the Romans, Goths, Saxons, Gauls, and other barbarians, called by the Saxons Yule, and in honour of the turning of the sun. On this point a pertinent remark is made by an old writer of the reign of Charles I. "If it doth appear that the time of the festival doth comply with the heathens' Saturnalia (Roman), this leaves no charge of impiety upon it; for, since things are best cured by their contraries, it was both wisdom and piety in the ancient Christians (whose work it was to convert the heathens from such, as well as other superstitions and miscarriages) to vindicate such times from the service of the Devil by appointing them to the more solemn and especial service of God." Among the Danes, from whom some of our legendary customs are derived, the festival was called Iol, and this name still survives, or did until recently, in Scotland. Sir Walter Scott tells us that

"the savage Dane
At Iol more deep the mead did drain."

It was solemnised, we are told, with great rejoicings, among which was one which would hardly find favour in modern times. It appears that the Danish nobles would amuse themselves by pelting each other with bones, and a Danish historian quaintly records of

one Hottus, that he was so generally attacked with these missiles that he was able to collect them and build himself an entrenchment as a sort of protection against future assaults. Another of their amusements was dancing round great fires of pine trees, on which occasions they performed their salutory feats with such vigour that if any of the party happened to leave hold he was flung into the fire just as if he had been shot out of a sling. The delinquent was then plucked out "like a brand from the burning," and compelled to quaff a certain measure of ale for "spoiling the King's fire."

The Saxons, however, have given us most of our traditional amusements and legends, and, as might be expected from their character—that of a self-indulgent, hearty-eating race—they mostly refer to good cheer. One of the prettiest, and perhaps best known, of the legends is that which refers to the Was-sail Bowl, which still lives in the "loving cup" now handed round at Christmas time.

The Saxons before drinking were in the habit of saying "Wæs Hæl" (be in good health), and the special occasion on which it was used, so as to become a Christmas custom, is said to have been when Hengist and Horsa invaded Kent. After the Saxons had conquered and were firmly established, the legend runs that Hengist gave a grand entertainment at his castle, to which the British King Vortigern was invited. The fair Rowena, the daughter of Hengist, in accordance with the Saxon custom, took a cup of wine to the King, and kneeling gracefully before him offered it to him, with the words, "Liever kynyng, wæs hæl" (Dear king, your health). Her grace and beauty so won upon the susceptible heart of the monarch that he fell in love with her there and then, married her afterwards, and we presume they lived happy ever after, as there is no chronicle to the contrary.

After miracle plays had ceased, and when still stage plays, if not in their infancy, were in their early childhood, there was a species of entertainment much in vogue at Court and at great noblemen's houses called "Masques," of which we have many good examples, notably those by Ben Jonson. Among these is one on Christmas, which was presented at Court in 1616. In the list of characters is given a very good description of the various Christmas traditional customs personified. It is worth reproducing. Father Christmas, or, as he calls himself, "Gregory Christmas," is attended by his ten sons and daughters led in a string by Cupid in a flat cap and a 'prentice's coat, with wings at his shoulders. Then follow:—

MISRULE, in a velvet cap, with a sprig, a short cloak, and great yellow ruff, like a reveller; his torchbearer bearing a rope, a cheese, and a basket.

CAROL, a long tawny coat, with a red cap, and a flute at his girdle; his torchbearer carrying a song-book open.

MINCED PIE, like a fine cook's wife dressed neat; her man carrying a pie, dish, and spoons.

GAMBOL, like a tumbler, with hoop and bells; his torchbearer armed with a colt-staff and a binding cloth.

POST AND PAIR, with a pair royal of aces in his hat, his garment all done over with pairs and fours; his squire carrying a box, cards, and counters.

NEW YEAR'S GIFT, in a blue coat, serving-man like, with an orange and a sprig of rosemary gilt on his head, his hat full of brooches, with a collar of gingerbread; his torchbearer carrying a marchpane (i.e., a confection of pistachio, nuts, almonds, sugar, &c.), with a bottle of wine on either arm.

MUMMING in a masquing pied suit, with a vizard, his torch-bearer carrying the box and ringing it.

WASSEL like a neat sempster and songster, her page bearing a brown bow drest with ribbands, and rosemary before her.

There are one or two others, but they are

of no importance. We will just run through them *seriatim*, except the last, which has been already described.

The Lord of Misrule, then, was the master of the revels, and whatever he ordained to be done, however extravagant or ridiculous, had to be carried out. In Scotland he was named the Abbott of Uareason, and was suppressed by Act of Parliament in 1555. Stowe tells us "that in the feast of Christmas there was wherever he lodged a Lord of Misrule or Master of Merry Disports, and the like had ye in the houses of every nobleman of honour or good worship, were he spiritual or temporal."

The representative of Christmas Carols is well represented with a flute and a song-book. Carol singing in honour of the Nativity has existed from early times. The word is derived from the Italian *Carola*, a song of joy, and was originally sung as an accompaniment to dancing. It was afterwards applied to Christmas songs in the Church, and Tertullian says that it was usual for the congregation at their religious festivals to place in the middle such as could sing, and call upon them to praise God in a hymn. Carol-singing is still practised in many parts of the country.

MINCED PIE—This brings us to the consideration of traditional Christmas Fare in general. Minced or shred pies are supposed to be in imitation of paste figures and sweetmeats given away at Rome at Christmas Eve. The paste case used to be oblong, to represent the manger of our Saviour—not round as now. Our ancestors used to eat Peacocks and Swans, and other similar luxuries, instead of the modern Turkey and Goose, as well as Barons of Beef, Sirloins, and "Brawn Royale," but the dish *par excellence* was the Boar's head, which was the first partaken of. At Queen's College, Oxford, it is brought in in great state to the present day. In the olden time it was brought in with the following Carol:—

"The bore's head in hande bring I,
With garlandes gay and rosemary,
I pray you all sing merrily,

Qui estis in convivio.

The bore's head, I understande,
Is the chiefe servyce in this lande,
Look wherewe it be fande,

Servite cum cantico.

Be gladd, lordes, both more and lasse,
For this hath ordayned our stewarde;
To cheer you all this Christmasse,
The bore's head with mustarde."

As far as cooking was concerned, the royal dish was either pickled, boiled, or roasted, and served in a great charger.

GAMBOL—This was a sort of merry-andrew, half conjuror, half clown, who generally accompanied the Lord of Misrule. "Post and Pair" was a game of cards, a great favourite at Christmas time, especially among the lower orders.

NEW YEAR'S GIFT.—This practice has survived to the present day in foreign countries, especially France and the United States of America. It originated with the Romans, Britons, and Saxons; indeed, it seems to have been universal among the earlier inhabitants of Europe. The Church was opposed to it, but the practice was kept up, especially among kings and nobles; and it is recorded that the most exacting of our own monarchs in this respect were Henry III. and Queen Elizabeth, who brought her business capacity to bear even in such a matter as this, and is said to have chiefly supported her immense wardrobe and her jewel-chests by her gifts; and in making returns she took care to be on the right side.

MUMMING is a sport derived from the ancient mysteries. It still exists in Yorkshire and the northern counties. A party would go about disguised, and with marks or vizards, to the neighbouring houses, some with swords and daggers, and enact some scriptural piece, or some part of

the "Nine Worthies," or the "Seven Champions of Christendom," and in return would be regaled with cakes and ale; and sometimes one would carry a bag, in which a dove was placed. Of late years, however, this custom has become much on the decline, like the village hand-ringers of our boyhood days, and many others of the old legendary pastimes which are dubbed superstitions by some of our modern School Board worthies, just as if the superstition had not died out of them ages ago, and left only harmless amusement behind.

There are many other traditional Christmas practices to which we might refer did space permit, such as the decorations of our churches, which, by the way, gave rise to two humorous letters in Addison's *Spectator*, in the first of which a young lady, "Mistress Jenny Sinner," complains that the parish clerk, who had been a gardener, has put so much "greenstuff" in the church that it looks like a greenhouse more than a place of worship, and, besides, she cannot now see "the young baronet, Sir Anthony." To this, in one of the following numbers, the clerk indignantly replies that he put a larger quantity of evergreens near her pew because so many people were scandalized by the way in which she rolled her eyes at all the eligible young men in church. The custom is derived from the ancient Druids, who at this time blessed the sacred mistletoe.

We will conclude with what may be called the children's legend, that of "Santa Claus," which is the nickname of St. Nicholas, who was not only the patron of children's Christmas presents, but also of clerks, and, Heaven forbid! also of thieves. Let us hope it cannot be the same St. Nicholas. The legend goes to say that if the children put their stockings up the chimney on Christmas Eve they will find them on Christmas morning filled with toys by the good saint. This pretty fable is implicitly believed by the little ones of Germany and the United States, where it finds most favour, and their parents do not disabuse them of it. Let us hope they will all find a goodly supply this present year of grace, and wish them and all our subscribers the old greeting, which is ever new,

A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR.

A NEW INDUSTRY.—Bricks made of cork now constitute one of the new German industries. The usual size is ten by four and three-fourths and two-and-a-half inches. They are prepared from small corks, refuse and cement, and have not only been used for certain building purposes on account of their lightness and isolating properties, but are also employed as a covering for boilers in preventing the radiation of the heat.

DON'T WHIP THEM.—Violence does not succeed with children. A parent who don't know how to govern a child without whipping it ought to surrender the care of that child to some wiser person. Sportsmen once thought that it was necessary to lash their dogs in training them for the field. They know now that the whip should never be used. Horsemen once thought that it was necessary to whip colts to teach them to start on the spot at the word, and pull steadily. They know now that an apple is better than the lash, and a caress better than a blow. If dogs and horses can be thus educated without punishment, what is there in our children which makes it necessary to slap and pound them? Have they less intelligence? Have they colder hearts? Are they lower in the scale of being? We have heard many old people say: "If we were to bring up another child we should never whip it." They are wise, but a little too late. Many children are of such quality that a blow makes them cowardly, or reckless, or deceitful, or permanently ugly. Whipping makes children lie. Whipping makes them hate their parents. Whipping makes home distasteful—makes the boys run away, makes the girls seek happiness anywhere and anyhow. Whipping is barbarous. Don't whip.

MADLINE GRANT.

CHAPTER XXXII.

MADLINE LISTENED to Lady Rachel's tirade with well-assumed indifference. Little did that gay and talkative lady guess that she was discouraging of Mr. Glyn's feelings to his wife—his wife, who suddenly felt a very curious and wholly novel sensation spring up in her bosom as she listened to her companion's idle chatter.

It had been all very proper that legions of men should admire her and pay homage to her, and Hugh, of course, would not be jealous; or if he was he was very ridiculous. Now, to quote an old proverb, "the boot was on the other foot."

She was to keep an unmoved countenance when she heard Hugh, her Hugh, proclaimed as a frightful flirt and saw him walking away with a very pretty, well-dressed young woman, carrying her prayer books, too, if you please.

She did not like it—no, most decidedly she did not like it. She could think of Hugh as working in his chambers, as enjoying the society of fussy lawyers, and now and then appearing in the great fashionable world as a guest who was well thought of, and popular with men; but popular with pretty girls was quite another view of the subject, a view she could not contemplate with anything approaching equanimity.

She found time and opportunity to sound Lady Rachel very craftily on the subject of Mr. Glyn and his delinquencies, and that feather-brained little person had replied, quite calmly,—

"Did I say that he was an awful flirt? I'm sure I quite forgot it. Well, I apologise to him. I was cross, now I remember, because that girl had snugged him up. I believed he is engaged or something. He does not go in much for ladies; still when he does, he can make himself very agreeable, as you shall judge. He is coming to dinner to-night."

Madeline started violently, and coloured warmly, for two things did not escape the lynx-eyed Lady Rachel.

"Why," she cried, "you don't mean to say that you are spooney on him too? My! lifting up hands and eyes. "Laura Creswell is coming this evening. Mind you don't tease each other's eyes out, my dear, that's all!"

"What do you mean, Rachel?" said Madeline, angrily. "Spooney—tear each other's eyes out! How you do let your imagination and your tongue run away with you!"

"Well, my love," returned the other, between two very leisurely sips of tea, "I never saw you bluish for anyone before. 'We wept, we sighed; we never blushed before,'" waving her teaspoon as she delivered this quotation. "Anyway, Mr. Glyn would not dare to think of you. He knows that you are destined for a coronet. Now Laura is a nice-looking girl, who literally raves about him, and who will have a very pretty fortune. I shall do my best to make the match. I like the fun of matchmaking, and he seems a very good fellow, and all these barristers are glad to get a wife with money; indeed, who is not?" stretching out both her arms, and yawning widely. "So mind you don't interfere with my little schemes, Maddie. Don't exert your fascinations on poor Mr. G., and don't put a spoke in dear Laura's wheel! You can pick and choose; and can afford to leave her Mr. Glyn!"

Maddie listened to all this in silence. "She was more silent than she used to be," thought her hostess.

"Leave her Mr. Glyn!" The idea tickled Madeline's fancy immensely. She could not control herself, and she suddenly leant back in her chair and gave way to a fit of laughing that quite threatened to become hysterical, whilst Lady Rachel looked on in open-mouthed amazement.

"Good gracious, Madeline!" she exclaimed, at last, as Madeline sat up and dried her eyes with her handkerchief, "and actually gasped for breath! 'Are you often taken like this? What in the world came over you—are you mad?'"

"I'm sure I can't say (partially unconscious, no!)—partly what you said about Mr. Glyn and—and—that girl, and partly my own thoughts."

"Your own thoughts must have been very funny," said the other, inquisitively; "I wish mine were occasionally as amusing."

"Yes, they were, rather; and now, if you don't mind, I'll go and write a few letters in my own room before dinner."

"I don't mind a bit, my dear child; this is, as you know, 'Liberty Hall.' But promise me one thing before you go."

"Yes," rising, "what is it?"

"Promise me that you won't flirt with Mr. Glyn."

"I—I flirt?" in a tone of indignant repudiation. "Of what are you thinking, Rachel—do I ever flirt?"

"I know that you say you don't flirt, and, maybe, think you don't flirt, my dear; but all the same you do. Your pretty eyes go a long way, and, maybe, say more than you think or intend them to say. Poor Levanter! they riddled his heart long ago."

"Pooh—nonsense! he has not got one to riddle, and you may make your mind perfectly easy about him as far as I'm concerned—also with regard to your other protégé, Mr. Glyn. Whatever comes or goes, I give you my word of honour that I shall never flirt with him." Exit.

The drawing-room was nearly full, and the tale of dinner guests complete, when Miss Grant again made her appearance, and walked into the apartment with the air and gait of a young princess. She had taken great pains with her toilet, and the pains had not been thrown away. She looked lovely as she greeted the new-comers with smiles and handshakes, one by one. She came to Laura Creswell last; a girl dressed in old gold satin and tulle, with a huge fringe, and a large, handsome face. She was leaning back in a low chair, looking up with all her eye-power—which was considerable—at a gentleman who was standing beside her, with his elbow on the piano, listening, with a smile of amused appreciation, to some anecdote that the lady was relating with great gusto. To this pair came Miss Grant, tall and beautiful, and dressed in white.

She accosted Miss Creswell (with whom she had a slight acquaintance) with politeness, and then looked inquiringly at her companion.

"What was he going to do?"

He had not seen her enter, nor had he expected to meet her—he was not aware that she was in England even, not having seen Mrs. Holt since she had paid her visit. So when he suddenly looked up and found that the girl in white, who was shaking hands with his companion, was Madeline, his wife, he was not a little startled, and became a shade—yes, just a shade paler. He looked her full in the face, he met her eyes point blank, and bowed. But she was not satisfied with this salutation, and held out her hand, which, of course, he was obliged to accept, and accepted it in a cool fashion, barely touching the proffered fingers; and then resuming his conversation with Miss Creswell with a promptitude that was almost rude; and that Madeline, who flushed hotly as she was thus snubbed, resented to the bottom of her heart. She had thought that she was doing great things in offering her hand, and this was all she got for it—a figurative slap in the face.

She felt humiliated, astonished, and angry as she took her place at the gaily decorated dinner table, and glanced over at Hugh and his partner.

She had lately had everything so much all her own way that she could not believe that Hugh, who had always been as pliable,

would really hold out in his resolution, and would not be ready to kiss and be friends when such was her good pleasure.

But no—Hugh was evidently made of sterner stuff. He, she remarked to herself, was determined to be disagreeable and to sulk, and, perhaps, to flirt. Well, two could play at all those games, and as she made up her mind to this resolution she sent a glance of defiance across the table over the flowers right into Hugh's eyes, and turning to her next neighbour, Lord Levanter, laid herself out to be agreeable to him for once, and with such very excellent success that he was lifted into the seventh heaven, and looked so tender, and whispered so inappropriately, and was altogether so publicly devoted and delighted that more than once Madeline's *vis-à-vis*, who had been becoming more and more distant in his answers to Miss Creswell minute after minute, felt filled with a fierce desire to rise, seize Levanter by the throat, and hurl him from the open window, which stood so conveniently behind him.

However, luckily for the success of Lady Rachel's entertainment he managed to restrain himself, and even to answer Miss Laura's questions, who had not failed to see who and what had attracted his wandering attention.

"Do you know Miss Grant?" she said, in her lowest tones.

"Yes, I have that honour."

"How ironically you said that," admiringly, "Surely you admire her. All London was raving about her last season, but I don't think she is as pretty as she was," she added, amiably.

"Oh! do you not?"—abstractedly, and still eyeing Lord Levanter with an expression of concentrated wrath and scorn.

"But she has heaps and heaps of money, and that goes a long way nowadays."

"Yes, I believe it does, nay!"—correcting himself quickly—"I know it does. It is more powerful than anything on earth, except one."

"And what is that?" she asked, curiously.

"Death," was the laconic reply.

"Death! Well, I suppose it is; but now tell me—and you have not answered my question yet—do you admire Miss Grant, or is she not too tall and slim for your style—rather May-pole?" (Miss Creswell herself was short, and a well-nourished young lady.)

"Oh! yes, I admire her"—with a swift glance across the table.

"You only say that doubtfully," returned the other, much encouraged. "It's very odd to me that, with all her money and all her looks and the immense sensation she has created, she has never married. She is a year older than I am. Is it not strange?"

Mr. Glyn said nothing, but, like the parrot, he thought a good deal; and that if the young lady beaming and smiling at the other side of the table were to marry the consequences would be, to say the least of it, unpleasant (a trip to Dartmoor Prison). He also made up his mind that she was an abominable flirt, and that any softening influences lately he had felt towards her would be completely thrown away. To flirt was bad enough, but to flirt before his face, although he had washed his hands of her; and with such a thick-headed look as Levanter was, shameless bravado; he could call it by no other name.

Madeline had not failed to read the storm-signals in her husband's countenance.

"Ah, ha!" she said to herself, triumphantly, "you are not altogether as callous and indifferent as you would seem, my good Hugh! I have it in my power to make you very angry and furiously jealous!" and stimulated by this enchanting discovery, the lady went on from bad to worse, all in a very quiet and refined style.

After dinner she enfranchised herself from the hopeful and happy Levanter, and went in, as Hugh noted, for one of the luminaries of the Foreign Office; and he and she sat on the same sofa and kept up a long, confidential

conversation for the whole remainder of the evening, shielding themselves behind Madeline's enormous white feather fan.

One of the earliest guests to depart was Mr. Glyn, his heart full of rage and disgust. He was barely master of himself; he was so indignant. He had not the civility to take leave of Madeline; he ignored her completely when he bade his hostess good-night, and that little lady, as she yawned her way upstairs after the last carriage had rolled away, patted her companion encouragingly on the arm, and said,—

"You were a very good girl to-night, Madeline, in one respect, though I must say for you, who are so very proper in your ideas, you made yourself rather remarkable with Freddy Loftus. However, it was of no great consequence, for you kept your promise, and did not flirt with Mr. Glyn. By-the-way, how silent he was. I wonder what put him out? I am afraid he and Laura have had a quarrel. After dinner, whilst Laura was singing, I took him in hand myself for a bit. Generally he is so amusing, and has lots to say, but to-night he positively had not a word to throw to the proverbial dog; and, it may be fancy, but it struck me that he looked as black as thunder. But why? What on earth could put him out here? I can't guess, can you?"

Miss Grant could form a very fair idea, but she was not inclined to take her lively little ladyship into her confidence; so she merely shrugged her shoulders, waved her lily-white hand in a valedictory manner, and with a yawn, opened the door of her own bower, and immediately vanished for the night.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MADLINE paid another visit to Mrs. Holt and Harry, but she did not see Hugh again before she returned to the Continent, and met her father at Aix-les-Bains.

Mr. Grant was very uneasy about himself still, and was resolved not to spend the next winter in England, and immediately after Christmas and New Year, once more settled himself and his belongings in his villa at Nice.

Madeline was rather averse to this arrangement, but not as much as we might have expected.

She had excellent news of little Harry. Hugh was still in what she called "the solks," and every day she lived weaned her more room her former life and wedded her more to her present condition.

At nineteen a girl is very adaptable, and readily falls into new grooves. It had come to this now with Madeline that she sometimes forgot she had ever had any other mode of existence than the present; and if her conscience (now becoming daily more callous) occasionally made a claim on behalf of her child, she promptly told herself that it was cared for—that Lady Louise De Quesne sent all her children out to nurse till they were three years of age and as to French people's children, they never saw them till they were five or six!

Harry was barely two; there was plenty of time. And as to Hugh, since he was so obstinate he must wait; and the idea of telling her father of her marriage she now put away in the lumber-room of her brain, and very rarely looked at it.

The spring, the early spring in the Riviera was just as charming as ever, but Mr. Grant found that he was rather "out of it" from not having been in England for considerably more than a year, when people at the "Cercle Anglais" referred to So-and-So's drag, or to such a one's shooting, or to a certain good race meeting.

He was, perforce, dumb. He did not like the sensation of having to hold his very garrulous tongue, and made a firm resolve that the month of May would find him and his once more back in Belgrave-square, and so it did.

Mr. Grant inaugurated his return with new horses, new liveries, new powdered footmen, and gave a series of most fashionable and *recherché* dinners.

He would have bidden Mr. Glyn to one of these entertainments, for the old gentleman had a tenacious memory, especially for things that his daughter expressly wished he would forget; and she quietly turned the subject, and did not encourage the idea of entertaining her husband under her unsuspecting parent's roof, and Mr. Grant's mind drifted away to other matters, chiefly financial, and Mr. Glyn's invitation card was not despatched.

Madeline found time to pay more than one visit to Harry, who was really a beautiful child, of whom even the most indifferent mother might well feel proud. Very proud, indeed, was Madeline.

He could walk and talk so nicely; and was such a pretty little fellow, and her visits from being spasmodic became of regular weekly occurrences.

Success had emboldened her; and every Saturday morning found her in Mrs. Holt's old-fashioned garden walking and playing between the high hollyhocks and sunflowers and lavender bushes with a fair-haired little boy.

What would Mr. Grant have said had he seen his lovely and dignified daughter running round and round and up and down the gravel paths, driven by two knotted reins and a fierce little driver, with a long whip with a whistle at the end of it?

Mr. and Mrs. Glyn never met; for her days, as we have seen, were Saturdays, and his were invariably Sundays.

Now and then she managed to steal an extra visit, for the attractions of Harry were becoming more and more irresistible, and she at times had almost steeled herself to the task of telling the truth—the whole truth, and nothing but the truth—to Mr. Grant; but latterly he had been curiously irritable and unusually irascible, even to her, his lovely daughter; his pass-key to the paradise of good society; and always deficient in moral courage, she delayed and delayed, and every day and week and month that she postponed this important announcement, only made the situation ten times worse.

Low fever was going about in the summer days, typhoid, and diphtheria, and the latter fastened its grim clutch on little Harry. It was a case as rapid as it was fatal.

He had been hot and heavy and not himself on Saturday when his mother saw him; but Mrs. Holt attributed this to the weather, which was unusually sultry. On Sunday his father, justly alarmed, summoned the local doctor, who at once pronounced that the little patient was a victim to the worst type of diphtheria sore throat.

On Monday Madeline was sent for. The child was seemingly better, though still very ill.

He lay in his little white bed and gazed at her with large, distended eyes. She made a very pretty picture as she sat beside him regardless of infection.

She stayed nearly all day. It so happened that her father was out of town; but anyway, she told herself, she would have come—nothing would have kept her; and when she took leave late in the evening the patient was sleeping, and the doctor's opinion more encouraging.

He said she need not alarm herself as he walked down with her to where her fly stood waiting in the lane.

"You really need not be uneasy, my dear madam," he said; impressively, "unless things take a very unexpected turn, and then, of course, we will let you know. He is a fine healthy child, and admirably nursed by your good woman," nodding towards the house.

"She is, indeed, a good woman," returned Madeline, fervently, as her mind locked back on Mrs. Holt's unwearied care and day and night attendance on her nursing.

She even seemed to grudge permission to Madeline to moisten his lips or fan him, or undertake a portion of her task.

"I'm afraid I can't come to-morrow unless I am really needed," said Madeline. "You say there is no danger now. You are sure now? I rely on you to tell me!"

"No, none whatever at present."

"Because if there were, I should stay all night."

"No occasion for that if you are urgently required elsewhere," said the doctor, all this time thinking it very strange that this pretty, agitated, tearful, young lady should not find it most important to remain with her sick—her only child.

Promising that she should have early intelligence next morning by telegram, he handed her into the fly and bowed her off the scene, just as another inquiring relation, equally anxious and equally near, came hurrying up on foot—the child's father.

"Most extraordinary state of affairs!" thought the doctor to himself. "What did it mean? There must be a screw loose somewhere. The child's parents living separately and mysteriously, and never alluding to each other—what did it mean?"

Mrs. Holt soon set the whole matter before him in these words,—

"They had quarrelled!"

Mr. Glyn remained at the farmhouse all night, sharing Mrs. Holt's vigil, and watching every turn, every movement, every breathe of the little sleeper as anxiously as she did herself.

In the morning there was no positive change one way or other. The pendulum, as it were, of little Harry's existence seemed to have paused for a time before it made that one vital movement in the direction either of life or death.

A message was despatched to his mother, which ran in these laconic words,—

"Just the same. Slept pretty well."

And Madeline, relieved in her mind, set to work at a very long and serious day's business; in short, grand preparations for a grand ball that they were giving that very evening. It was to be the ball of the season.

Invitations had been out for four weeks. Royalty had signified its intention of being present.

Mr. Glyn looked upon the festivity as the supreme occasion of his life, the summit of his wishes and ambition fully and flawlessly attained, and he was happy.

Only, of course, there is a thorn in every rose.

A pending law suit, touching some very valuable mining rights, was looming in the distance, and the prospect made him very uneasy and very snappish.

However, he resolved to make the most of superb present, and give an entertainment the fame of which should ring from one end to England to the other.

He fully carried out his favorite saying, "money is no object." The floral decorations alone, for halls, staircases, and drawing-rooms cost the pretty penny of two thousand pounds.

The best band in town was, of course, to be in attendance; and as to the supper, it was to be a supper, the very *menu* of which would make Lucullus green with envy; and Madeline's dress was to come from Worth, and was to be quite special, by Mr. Grant's own commands.

With all these grand preparations in view it will easily be understood that it was with some trepidation that Madeline asked her father to postpone the ball.

She made her request very timidly, with falling heart and faltering lips; in fact, the end of her sentence died away on the air when she beheld the terrible expression on her parent's face.

"Pat off the ball!" he roared. "Are you mad? Pat off Royalty, after all I've done to get them! Pat off!"—he actually choked over the word for a whole minute—"when

you know, too, that there's not another day in the season. Every single night is taken. Why, what do you mean?—what's your reason?" he almost shouted.

"I thought—I fancied that the heat, and Ascot Races happening the next day, and—and—that was all," she muttered, lamely.

"Oh," doubtfully. "Well, your reasons are simply bomb, and the ball comes off on Tuesday."

This suggestion was made on Saturday after her return from the farm.

"And remember, Madeline, I shall expect you to stir yourself, look after the decorations going up, have an eye to the laying of the supper tables, see that the men do the floors properly, and that there are not any old waltzes in the programme. You will have your work cut out, and I mine. It will be the busiest day in your life, and the greatest. It's not a common thing to entertain Royalty."

As he said this he jumped up and paced the room, and rubbed his hands in an ecstasy of expectation.

"There's a pile," he suddenly exclaimed, pointing to a heap of letters, "of people actually asking for invitations—invitations for themselves, invitations for their friends, sisters, brothers, and so on—people that would hardly know us when we were in town the first season, but it's my turn now. I'll have none of them! Whatever else the ball will be it shall be select!" waving his arm with a gesture that was ludicrous in its pomposity.

"By the way, that fellow Glyn—it seems that he is the coming man, and Bagge and K-effe have given him the brief in my suit I met him yesterday in the street and asked him. He's a presentable-looking sort of chap," nodding apologetically at his daughter; "but would you believe it, he would not come, although I told him it was to be something out of the common; and fancy his reason," pausing dramatically; the little gentleman was still pacing the room. "You will never guess—you will be as astounded as I was. He said his child was ill," staring hard at Madeline to see the effect of this announcement.

Madeline never raised her eyes, but sat with them fixed on a certain pattern in the carpet, and looked not the least surprised—only rather white and rigid.

"He seemed quite in a fright," proceeded Mr. Grant, volubly, "and very much hurried and put out. I had no idea that he was a married man, had you?"

Before Mr. Glyn's wife's dry lips could frame an appropriate answer to his very plain question a footman entered with another batch of notes on a salver, and thus Mr. Grant's attention was providentially distracted from his unhappy daughter.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

In due time all the preparations were completed for the reception of Mr. and Miss Grant's guests.

The grand staircase was lined with palm trees and tropical ferns, and lights were cunningly arranged among the dusky green foliage.

A fountain of white rose scent played among maidenhair ferns at the head of this splendid and unique approach, and here stood the host and hostess, side by side.

Mr. Grant was adorned in a plain evening suit (would, oh, would that he might have decked himself in diamonds!) and a perennial smile; his daughter arrayed in a misty-looking garment of silver brocade and silver gauze, and her neck and arms one blaze of brilliants, in her hand a bouquet of crimson flowers nearly as large as a tea-tray.

She required no adjuncts to set off her appearance; but there they were, and she looked as superior to most of her lady guests, who were some of them of average everyday prettiness, as an arm lily to a single dahlia.

Her colour and her eyes were equally bright—flushed by excitement, and, in some degree, by anxiety.

No news, she told herself, was good news, and the morning telegram was reassuring.

There was no need to fret and worry herself. Half the evils in the world are those that have never happened.

So she cast doubt and care behind her as she took her place in the Royal quadrille, and prepared to abandon herself to the occasion.

No one in their senses would dream for a moment that the beautiful, brilliant, smiling Miss Grant had a care on her mind, much less a load of anxiety with regard to a sick child.

She, indeed, lulled all her fears to sleep, and played the part of hostess to perfection, not dancing over much, as became the lady of the house, till quite late in the evening, or, more properly speaking, early in the morning, and having a word—the right word—and a smile for everybody.

The ball went off without a single drawback.

August guests remained unusually late; the supper, the floor, the lighting was faultless. Mr. Grant was informed by several important guests that such an entertainment reminded them of the Arabian Nights for its magnificence; that it would be a ball among balls, a precedent in princely hospitality.

He was almost beside himself with pride and self-satisfaction. Truly those heavy cheques that had to be drawn to pay for his pleasures were well redeemed.

He unfolded his feelings to his daughter as they stood alone in the big ball-room after the very last guest had taken leave and the carriages were rapidly rolling from the door.

His little sharp eyes shone, his mouth twitched, his hand actually trembled with excitement and triumph.

"You did it splendidly, Maddie," he exclaimed, vehemently. "If you were a duchess you could not have hit it off better. I often wonder where you got your manners and your air, and the way of saying things. Your mother was something of the same style, too. Well," looking round, "it's all over. They are putting out the candles. It's been a success, more than a success, a—a—" hunting for a word—"a triumph. I wish some of my old pals in the West Indies could have seen it. Bless me, how they would stare! A trifle better this than plantation dances. I feel a bit tired and giddy. I expect I shall be knocked up to-morrow. Don't you get up early—I mean to-day. There's the light streaming in now. Get away to your bed."

Madeline had listened to this paean of triumphal satisfaction without any remark, only opening her mouth to yawn, and yawn, and yawn.

She was very, very tired, and now that the stir, and the whirl, and excitement were over felt ready to collapse from sheer fatigue, and she very readily obeyed her parent's behest, and kissing him on his wrinkled cheek, walked off to her own room.

Josephine was sitting up for her, half-asleep, and the wax candles on the dressing-table were glittering in their silver sockets. Daylight was streaming through the blinds.

"Oh, miss," she said, shaking her head from side to side, and rubbing her eyes, "I've been asleep, I do believe. I've waited up to unlace your dress, though you said I need not, but you could never—never undo it yourself!" beginning her task at once, whilst her equally sleepy mistress stood before the glass and slowly removed her gloves, and bracelets, and heavy diamond necklet, and yawned at her own reflection.

"It was splendid, mademoiselle. Never—not even in Paris—did I see such a fête, such a ball. I saw it all from a little place behind the band. What crowds, and what toilettes! but yours was the—the most charming of all."

Ah, there is nothing like Worth, and then a good figure and a pretty face!

"It went off well, Josephine, and papa is pleased; but I am glad it's over," said her mistress, wearily, now feeling the reaction already setting in. "Mind you don't let me sleep past ten o'clock."

"Ten o'clock, mademoiselle! Why, it's five now," said Josephine, in a tone of horror. "Mademoiselle, you will be knocked up, you—"

"Why, what is this?" interrupted her mistress, in a strange, hurried voice, snatching up a telegram that lay on the table in its orange envelope, as yet unopened, and had hitherto been concealed by being unintentionally covered with an ivory-backed hairbrush, as if of no importance.

"Oh, I forgot. I fell asleep, you see. It came for you last night at ten o'clock, just as all the company were arriving, and I could not send it to you. I hope it does not matter."

But evidently it did matter, for her young lady was reading it with a ghastly-drawn countenance, and the hand that held the paper shook so much that the message rattled as if in a breeze.

This was what she was reading with strained, starting eyes:—

"Mrs. Holt to Miss Grant, 9 30.

"Come at once—there is a change."

And this was nearly eight hours ago.

"Josephine," she said, with a look that appalled the little Abigail, "why did you not give me this? It's a matter of life and death. If—if—" with a sudden catch in her breath, "I am too late, I will never—never forgive you. Here," with a gesture of frenzy, literally tearing off her dress, "take away this vile rag—these wretched things"—snatching the diamond stars out of her hair, and flinging them passionately on the floor—"for which I have said myself. Get me a common dress, woman. Quick, and don't stand there looking like a fool!"

Josephine had indeed been looking on as if she were petrified, and asking herself if her mistress had gone stark-staring mad?

Mechanically, she picked up the despised ball-dress, and brought out a morning cotton, which Madeline wrested from her hands, and flung over her head, saying:—

"Send for a hansom—fly—fly," and thus adjusted and catching a spark of Madeline's excitement, she ran out of the room, and hurriedly despatched a heavy-eyed and amazed, John Thomas, for the cab, with many, many impressive gesticulations.

When she returned she found that Miss Grant had already fastened her dress, tied a lace scarf round her neck, put on the first hat she could find, had a purse in one hand, and her gloves in the other, and was ready. So was the hansom, for one had been found outside, waiting and hoping for a j.b.

Madeline did not delay an instant. She ran downstairs—down between the fading lights, the tropical palms, the withering flowers, who had had their one little day, and it was over. Down she fled, along the red cloth carpetings, and under the gay awnings, and sprang into the vehicle.

Josephine, who had hurried after her, was just in time to see her dash from the door.

"Grande Ciel!" she ejaculated, to two amazed men servants, who stood beside her, looking very limp in the now bright summer's morning. "Did anyone ever see the like of that? She's gone away in her white satin ball slippers!"

"What's up? What's the matter?" demanded one of her companions, authoritatively.

"What's the meaning of Miss Grant tearing out of the house as it she was going for a fire-engine, or as if she was mad?"

"I can't tell you. It's something that came in a telegram. Some one that's ill. She said, life or death. She's mad with fear of some-

thing. Oh! you should have seen her eyes. She looked—when she opened the paper—awful. I thought she would have struck me almost, because I kept it back!"

"Anyhow, she could not have gone before, whatever it is. But what can it be?" said one of the footmen, stroking his chin with an air of deep mental research.

That was just the question no one could throw the least glimmer of light upon; and leaving the three servants, still standing speculating in the hall, we follow Madeline down to Holt-hill.

She caught an early train. She was equally lucky in getting a fly at the station by bribing heavily, and imploring the man to gallop all the way.

She arrived at the farm exactly at seven o'clock, and springing out of the trap rushed up the garden, and burst into the kitchen, white and breathless.

"She was too late!" The truth came home to her in one agonising pang. It felt as if a dagger had been planted in her heart, for there at the kitchen table sat Mrs. Holt, her elbows resting on it; her apron thrown over her head, emitting long-drawn gasping sobs, the picture of grief.

Madeline trembled from head to foot as she stood in the doorway. Her dry lips refused to form a sound; her heart was beating as if it would choke her. She could not have asked the question if her life depended on it.

Mrs. Holt hearing the steps threw down her apron and confronted Madeline. "I thought it was you," she ejaculated in a husky voice.

"Well, you are too late; he died, poor darling, at daybreak in these arms," holding out those two hard-working extremities to their fullest extent, with a gesture that spoke volumes.

"I will not believe it! It could not be true! It—it is impossible," broke in Madeline, fiercely. "The doctor said there was no danger. Oh, Mrs. Holt! for mercy's sake, I implore you to tell me that you are only—only frightening me. You think I have not been a good mother; that I want a lesson. That—that—I will see for myself!" hurrying across the kitchen, and opening a well-known door.

Alas! What was this that she beheld and that turned every vein in her body to ice? It was death for the first time! There before her in the small white bed lay a little still baby with closed eyes and folded hands, a lily between them, the bed around it—yes, it was now it—already strewn with fresh white flowers, on which the morning dew still lingered. Who strews white flowers on the living? The truth came home to her in one lightning flash. Harry was dead! There was no look of suffering now on the little white brow. He looked as if he were asleep; his pretty, fair curls fell naturally over his forehead. His long, dark eyelashes swept his cheek. He might be asleep. But why was he so still? No breath, no gentle rising and falling disturbed his tiny crossed hands, so lately full of life and mischief, and now!

With a low cry Madeline fell on her knees beside the child and laid her lips upon his. How cold they were! But, no, he could not, should not be dead, urged her mother's heart, in a mad frenzy of despair.

"Harry, Harry!" she whispered, "Harry, I have come; open your eyes, darling, only for one—one—moment; and look at me; do, or I shall go mad!"

"So you have come at last," said a voice close to her, and looking round she saw Hugh Glyn, pale and haggard from a long night's vigil, looking as stern as an avenging angel.

"It was hardly worth while to come now; there is nothing to need your care any longer. Poor little child, he is gone!" Here his faltering voice broke, and he paused for a second; then proceeded with a sudden burst of indignation, "And whilst he was dying his mother was dancing," glancing as he spoke at Madeline's visible and cringing white satin shoes.

"I only got the telegram this morning at five o'clock," returned Madeline with awful calmness; the full reality had hardly come home to her yet. "And yesterday, why was I not sent for?"

"You were sent for when the child was first taken ill. Any other woman in the world but you would have remained with him. I know that you had a great social part to play; that you dared not be absent from your father—that you dared not tell him that other—the nearest, dearest, holiest of claims—appealed to you here," pointing to the dead child.

"You have sacrificed me—you have sacrificed him to your Moloch—money! It is not fitting that I should say more to you in this presence. Your own conscience, if you possess one—and surely you are not going to be totally hardened—will tell you far sadder, sadder truths than any human lips. It may comfort you to know that, although your presence would have been a comfort, he—he asked for you," his voice shook as he spoke, "as long as he could articulate. You could not have saved him from the moment the change set in last evening. The doctor pronounced the case hopeless."

Madeline stood and looked at her husband as one in a dream. She uttered no sound, but she shivered involuntarily as if struck by a blast of icy wind. And Hugi, although he spoke with a certain sort of deliberation, and as if he was putting (as he was) an immense mental restraint upon his feelings, looked at her with a pale, rigid face, and his eyes shone like a flame.

"Go!" he said, with a gesture of dismissal, "there is no occasion for you to linger here, Miss Grant. You and I are now as dead to one another as this child is to us both, and we look back at our past as a dream. There is nothing now in common between us but a grave."

Incidents which take some time to describe are sometimes almost instantaneous in action.

(To be continued.)

SIMPLE integrity, simple fairness, simple justice, to poor and rich alike, giving to each one his rightful dues, striving neither to over-sell nor to underbuy goods or labour, incurring no debt's that admit of a possible doubt of being promptly met, and luring no one else to do so—in short, carrying out in the daily life the principles of honesty and fairness, is the very best and most efficient means of benefiting the community, and the only foundation on which to build a benevolence worthy of the name.

CONCISE TALK.—Few men understand how to express their ideas forcibly and concisely. If one has plenty of time at his disposal one can make himself understood, but too often the number of words used is out of all proportion to the ideas. The peculiarly nervous temperament, and the limited vocabulary of most half-educated men lead them to express themselves in a vague, verbose fashion. They are too long in getting at the pith of what they are talking about; and when they reach this point their inability to remember the two or three words that would put their thoughts in a compact, intelligible form, compels them to use ten, where one, were it the right one, would have been sufficient. Not infrequently this vagueness is a cloak assumed for the moment to cover important information or ill-defined ideas regarding the subject that is being discussed. This false pride, which shows itself in a desire to seem to know something about that of which one knows little or nothing, is the cause of much loose, meaningless talk which may serve its purpose temporarily, but which more often leaves a listener in such a state of uncertainty that he is as likely as not to attribute his doubts to his own dullness. Honesty, simplicity and exactness are not qualities that are conspicuous in the conversation of most men we meet.

SOCIETY.

THE DUK AND DUCHESS OF CONNAUGHT are expected to leave India at the end of March, and it is probable they will return home through America by way of San Francisco.

THE HON. MRS. LEGGE (Amy Lambart), on the morning of her marriage, received from the Queen by special messenger a bouquet made by herself, with the request that she would take it away with her, a request which the late maid of honour undoubtedly complied with.

THE DUKE OF RICHMOND AND GORDON was lately presented with a life-sized portrait of himself by his Scotch tenantry.

Mrs. PARKER, widow of Captain Paynter, on the occasion of her marriage to Lieutenant Colonel J. T. D. Talbot Crosbie last month, wore a stylish costume of deep ruby velvet, trimmed with handsome passementerie, bonnet and muff to match. When the gallant colonel left for Paris to spend the honeymoon, his bride wore a long black velvet suit, trimmed with sable, and a shot silk dress.

THE "Hesperides" of Raphael, from the Bismarck collection, has been purchased by the Baron Edmond de Rothschild, of Paris, for 25,000 guineas.

THE approaching marriage is announced of Lord Burghersh, eldest son of the Earl and Countess of Westmoreland, and the eldest daughter of Mr. R. C. Naylor. Another is also arranged between the Hon. T. Vereker, eldest son of Viscount and Viscountess Gort, and Eleanor, second daughter of the late A. Stirling, Esq., of Hemsterley Hall, Durham.

THOMAS is much rejoicing in the family of the Duke of Hamilton, in consequence of the birth of a daughter, which took place on the 1st inst.

LIEUTENANT-GENERAL LORD CHELMSFORD, Constable of the Tower, is most likely to succeed Sir C. Beauchamp Walker, K.C.B., as Director-General of Military Education, when appointment he vacates by the age clause of the Royal warrant on retirement.

A MARRIAGE is arranged between the Comtesse Haléne Bismarck, daughter of the late Count Bismarck (cousin to the German Minister) and granddaughter of the late Sir Henry Watkin Williams-Wynn, at one time Ambassador to the Court of Denmark, and Mr. Cripps, the well-known authority on silver plate.

THE MARQUIS AND MARCHIONESS OF STAFFORD's wedding presents have been removed from town in four railway vans to Trenham, where addresses will shortly be presented to the bride and bridegroom, and where the presents will be on view, together with several others not enumerated.

THE marriage of Mr. Alfred Eckersley with Miss Rachel Huxley was solemnised on the 14th November at St. Mark's, Hamilton-terrace, in the presence of a number of relatives and literary friends of Professor Huxley, who gave his daughter away. Canon Duckworth officiated.

THE bride wore a dress of cream satin, with long square train, and a flounce of Mechlin lace over the petticoat, tight fitting bodice, and a spray of myrtle and jasmine on the left shoulder, with a wreath of the same, and full veil fastened with a diamond brooch.

THE bridesmaids—the Misses Huxley (two), May, Pollock, and Arnold—costumes were of deep green velvet and satin merveilleux, the skirts plain, with drapery at the back, and tight bodices open in the front, showing satin waistcoats. On their left shoulders they wore some chrysanthemums, of which flowers their bouquets were likewise composed, being tied with yellow satin ribbon. Their hats, which matched their dresses, had tufts of marabouts and feathers. Mr. and Mrs. Huxley entertained their guests at a breakfast in Marlborough-place, and the bride and bridegroom left subsequently for Spain.

STATISTICS.

PRISON POPULATION IN INDIA.—It appears that the gaol population of the Central Provinces of India for 1883 was in all 15,849, of whom 11,645 were convicts, 3,574 under trial, and 630 civil prisoners. Of these, 3,532 remained in prison at the close of the year. Compared with the previous year, there was a decrease of convicts and prisoners under trial to the extent of 908 in the former and 48 in the latter category, while civil prisoners increased by 13. The daily average of convicts was, in 1882, 4,008, and in 1883, 3,741.

CHILDREN'S EMPLOYMENT IN FRANCE.—The *Journal Officiel* states that, in accordance with the law of 1874, which provides for the inspection of all industrial establishments where young people are employed, 47,817 shops and factories were visited during last year, of which 24,756 were in Paris. This is a considerable extension of the field under inspection; for even in the metropolis, which naturally contains the lion's share of general industries, the visits only numbered 598 in 1876. The total number of children of both sexes who came under the inspectors' notice was 213,101, a very fair increase since 1876, when it was 119,462. In that year Paris had 3,350 under inspection, whereas last year it was 39,484. The latter figure is, however, a rather serious diminution from that of 1882, when it was 42,957, caused by the long continuance of industrial depression.

GEMS.

It is the way with half the truth amidst which we live, that it only haunts us and makes dull pulsations that are never born into sound.

Most controversies would soon be ended if those engaged in them would first accurately define their terms and then rigidly adhere to their definitions.

There is nothing which helps us to feel that our lives have been worth living as the humble but grateful consciousness that we have helped some other soul to fulfil its destiny.

The conduct that issues from a moral conflict has often so close a resemblance to vice that the distinction escapes all outward judgments, founded on a mere comparison of actions.

It depends on the mood of a man whether he shall see the sunset or the fine poem. There are always sunsets, and there is always genius; but only a few hours so serene that we can relish nature or criticism.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

BOILED OATMEAL PUDDING.—Pour a quart of boiling milk over a pint of the best fine oatmeal; let it soak all night in a cool place, else the milk might turn; next day beat an egg in, and mix a little salt with it; butter a basin that will just hold it, cover it tight with a floured cloth, and boil an hour and a-half. Eat it with sugar, or oiled butter and salt. When cold, slice and toast it, and eat it as oatmeal cake buttered.

PLUM PUDDING.—One pound of currants, one pound of plums, one pound of mixed peel, one pound of suet, one-half pound of bread crumbs, one-half pound of flour, six eggs—six yolks and four whites—one pound of sugar, one teaspoonful of mixed spice, half-pint of old ale, one scraped carrot—the red part—half a nutmeg, one-quarter ounce of bitter almonds, one wineglass of brandy. In mixing the pudding, let the suet and bread crumbs be very fine, the currants well washed and dry, the plums carefully stoned; make flour-and-water paste, and cover the pudding before tying down; boil six hours. With care this will be found an excellent receipt. A few sweet almonds, blanched and cut in strips, and stuck in the pudding, ornament it prettily.

MISCELLANEOUS.

EXHIBITION OF INVENTIONS.—The number of applications already sent in for next year's Exhibition of Inventions at Kensington represent more than twice the available space. Novelties shown at the Health and Fisheries Exhibitions will be excluded, except in rare exceptional instances, and the display is to be confined to useful inventions patented since 1862.

JAPANESE WOMEN.—In Japan, as in America, the gentle sex monopolize most of the attention of society, while their unfortunate brothers are left to struggle for themselves. This discrimination begins early in life, but it is the Japanese custom to give baby girls the names of delicate and lovely plants or flowers, while the boys are simply numbered, and are known as First-boy, Second-boy, and so on.

CHRISTMAS DAY is a fine occasion for getting odd scraps of information about odd things. On that day one was able to discover from the papers that Mr. Horsley designed the first Christmas-card, and to fortify oneself with the whole philosophy of Schopenhauer, and to learn that nothing is but idea, and that idea will soon become nothing. Then came a picture of all the green-rooms of Paris, a description of the Fitzwilliam Museum at Cambridge, a poem about "tips," and such Christmas descriptions as made one happy to think that the season came but once a year. Now that one has learnt it, however, that idea is all and idea is nothing Christmas sentiment does not greatly matter.

GENEROSITY is a privilege that a man has no right to indulge in as long as he refuses to perform a single well-defined act of justice. Indeed, we may safely assert not only that all men and women should be just; before they are generous, but that they cannot be really generous before they are just. Should we call that man generous who took the bread that one poor man had earned for his children and gave it to another family because they were hungry? Yet what else does he do who withholds a just debt, or takes advantage of a man's poverty or ignorance to obtain from him labour or goods at less than a fair price, and then bestows such ill-gotten gains upon any so-called benevolent object, public or private?

EXERCISE.—About mid-afternoon is the best time for gentle outdoor exercise. Early morning exercise has been favoured, but it is as much to be reprobated as early mental or physical labour, because at that time vitality is at its lowest ebb, and it needs stimulation rather than further depletion; certainly none but the gentlest exercise should be taken until the exhausted system has been supplied with abundant nourishment. In the early afternoon, especially if a noonday dinner be taken, the results of mental labour are not, as a rule, satisfactory, because digestion and sound thought cannot proceed simultaneously; besides, from noon until after three o'clock there is a perceptible disinclination to work; the comparative absence of electricity from the atmosphere makes the head heavy, and induces drowsiness; the same condition prevails again between nine or ten o'clock at night and sunrise. There is little question of the fact that atmospheric electricity affects the quality of mental labour; when it is in excess, from nine o'clock in the morning until noon, the best work is done, all other conditions being favourable; again, from about six o'clock in the evening, it rises and is maintained for some three hours. In regard to season, there is less atmospheric electricity in midsummer than in midwinter. In default of the ability to engage in the requisite exercise, persons living sedentary lives should bathe nightly in as cool water as their capacity for reaction will permit, and employ subsequent vigorous friction with bath towel or flesh brush.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

C. H. D.—August 23, 1880, fell on Friday.

B. V.—So long as you are a wife you should accept no attentions which bear any relation to courtship. You are very indiscreet. Dismiss the young man, or you will very likely find the divorce will not be granted.

E. R. G.—Wire is made by drawing a rod of soft, hot iron through a hole smaller than the rod in a block of steel. If a still smaller sized wire is desired it is drawn through a smaller hole, and this process is repeated until the required size is attained.

C. R. T.—You and your friend should write something adapted to the occasion. Something of a local character, in which you could bring in allusions to snafes and persons known to all the company, in a good-natured way, would be apt to please more than anything else.

GERTRUDE.—We do not think that you overstepped the bounds of modesty in asking the gentleman to accompany you to church. It was a very proper thing to do. He should make himself more useful and agreeable if he wishes to enjoy your society.

AMINA.—It would not be proper for you to write to the gentleman. If he actually loves you he will write to you or call upon you. Perhaps he is absent from the country, or away from home on business at a distance. All you can do is to wait patiently for the development of events.

ROSEY.—That boy-lover of yours is evidently an untrustworthy person. He cares but very little for you. If he loved you he would not have acted as you describe. The sooner you cease to care for him the better it will be for you, and then it will be time, and not till then, to think about marrying somebody else.

K. L.—L. Liverpool. 2 The expression, "He left a wife," is perfectly correct, because the wife only became a widow just as the leaving was completed. It is only when you give to "left" the meaning "remained behind" that the expression, "He left a widow," would be correct.

M. E.—The words "Bona viro auro," taken alone, are difficult to translate intelligently. They probably mean "favour to a good man." The last word "auro" is the nominative plural of "aurum" which means gold. The phrase may thus be translated: "Give gold to a good man," or, "To the good man heaps of riches."

AVA.—Hebe, in mythology, was the goddess of truth; she was a daughter of Jupiter and Juno. She served her fellow divinities with nectar at their festivals, assisted her mother in putting the horses to her chariot, and bathed and dressed her brother Mars. She is said to have been married to Hercules after his apothecias, and to have been the mother of two sons by him.

AMY R.—It would have been better on the gentleman's part to have got some common friend to have properly introduced him. A lady should have someone to whom she can refer for some knowledge of the character and social standing of an aspirant for her society. You had better introduce the young man to your father when he calls, tell your father how the acquaintance came about, and let him find out something of the young man.

POLLY ECCLES.—He is not ready to marry yet. Probably he made up his mind that he was getting on too fast. He probably likes you just as well as ever, but does not wish you to regard him as a suitor. Do not ask him for your letters and photograph, but treat him just as usual. He may feel that his circumstances do not permit him to win the heart of a young girl without a better prospect of a speedy marriage. The hair enclosed is bright brown.

ADRY.—The best course for you is to restrain the expression of your love, and let the young man see that you are able to live without him. His should always keep in mind that they are to be sought after and wooed. Any indication on their part of a disposition to do the wooing repels admirers. When the gentleman seeks to be restored to your favour then you can receive him. You have reason to be displeased with him.

EDWARD R. T.—You had better take some steps to cause the author of the slanders to stop putting them forth. What steps are best you must judge for yourself with the aid of friends. The law is rather a poor resource against a slanderer. You can discredit him more by a personal explanation and by directly confronting him. Do not allow these slanders to interfere with your wooing. If you are innocent, marry the young lady as soon as you can gain her consent and that of her parents. The amount mentioned is sufficient to start a young couple very comfortably.

A. V. M.—The only information on the subject that we know of is such as is furnished by Canadian lumbermen themselves and persons who have seen them at work. It is a very old adage that practice makes perfect. It is no more difficult to learn to stand upright on a log and ride it down a stream than it is to learn to perform on a tight-rope, or to ride several horses at the same time, or for a man to learn to ride a horse standing on his head with the horse going at a gallop. Circus performers do all these wonderful things, and other things still more wonderful. We have read and heard of lumbermen who could ride logs with the most surprising skill after a few years' practice, and so far as we know there is no reason why you should doubt your cousin's statement.

A. V.—The word is pronounced "biv-wak," with the accent on the first syllable and both vowels short.

E. C. B.—The name Edward means "happy keeper"; Blanche, "fair"; Hermione, "an interpreter."

P. F. W.—The line—"Act well your part, there all the honour lies," is by Pope.

YUTTA AND JANET F.—We never insert matrimonial advertisements under any circumstances.

L. B. D.—Your mother is right, and you are wrong. You have no right to call yourself a lady if you allow strange gentlemen to address you in the street.

W. R. (Longdon).—Write to the Commander-in-Chief, Horse Guards, Whitehall, London, stating full particulars; give the name, regiment, and date of joining.

M. J. P.—1. Not if they are well acquainted with one another. 2. Robert means "famous in council"; Mabel, "my beauty"; Isabella, "fair Eliza." 3. The hair is auburn.

R. N. S.—1. The pansy means "think of me." 2. You are too anxious. He has probably not reached his destination yet. You will get a letter in due course.

EFFIE A.—There is no such law. Any degrees of couplings may marry, so you may make your mind perfectly easy.

S. J. N.—There are such associations in this and other countries. We know nothing of the special advantages offered by the one to which you refer.

R. B.—We have no recollection of the cases, or of those events. Your best source of information will be the records of the court before which evidence was given.

SWEET CHRISTMAS TIME.

Sweet Christmas time
When church-bells chime
And songs of praise are heard;
When old friends meet,
When fond hearts beat,
And every pulse is stirred.

When gifts are paid,
And joy alone is king;
When eyes grow bright,
When carols seem light,
And tender memories cling.

The church-bells ring,
The children sing,
The presents deck the tree;
The fires glow—
The viands flow—
What day could brighter be?

To lively air
The young and fair
Whirl o'er the creaking floor;
The old, grey men
In thought again
Live all their childhood o'er.

Sweet Natal Day!
Let none, we pray,
Forget its inspiration;
A Child was born
On Christmas morn,
And brought the world salvation!

D. S. W.

B. V. R.—We cannot enter into questions of political economy. It ought not to be difficult for you, however, if you have mastered the books you name, to solve the problem for yourself.

ROSE S.—There can be no possible doubt that the world is round, or, rather, what scientists call "an oblate spheroid," being somewhat the shape of an orange. It has two principal movements, one round the sun in the ecliptic, and the other on its own axis.

PHILIP G.—1. Give your sweetheart an umbrella, which cannot fail to prove a useful present. 2. In selecting such articles of wearing apparel choose that make which upon trial is found most comfortable and durable. 3. Rubbing with the hand will be found to relieve the swelling.

G. G. S.—The common striped snake thrusts out its tongue readily enough, but a careful observer of the habits of animals, who has kept in captivity large numbers of striped and other snakes, tells us that he has never known the striped snake to hiss. This, of course, does not prove absolutely that the striped snake never hisses, and we should be interested in hearing the observations of others on this subject.

A. M. E.—A method of permanently removing superfluous hair has lately been introduced, which consists in passing a fine needle down along each hair into its root, and then applying a slight electric current. When done by a skilful operator it is nearly painless, removes the hair permanently, and leaves very little mark, but only a few doctors have the necessary apparatus or experience, and as the process takes time it is, of course, expensive to have much hair removed by it.

C. R.—Postaloss, Froebel Count Fellenberg, and Dr. Arnold, the father of Matthew Arnold, are among the most noted developers of education in Europe. Dr. Nott, the celebrated President of Union College, Horace Mann, and Dr. McCosh are among the most eminent educators in the United States. Dr. McCosh is the only one of these noted men who is now living, and he is equally distinguished in Great Britain and America.

ARLEY.—The following mixture applied to dark hair is said to change it to a flaxen hue:—Muric acid, two ounces; liquid ammonia, half ounce; rosewater, one pint.

B. W. G.—After a thorough course in physiology, anatomy, and the other studies necessary for a degree in a good medical school, you would only be just ready to take up the study of a specialty, like cases of the throat, and even a specialist would call in a brother specialist to examine and treat his own case.

R. M. S.—You should not have granted a mere friend the privilege of kissing you, even if you did grant him your company. If ever you are engaged to a man whom you really love, will you not be a little sorry that you did not keep your kisses for him more exclusively?

W. M.—1. The "u" in "dude" is pronounced like the "u" in "duty." The word is vulgar, and the less it is pronounced the better. 2. Lime-water is made by pouring water on slaked lime, stirring the mixture, and when it has settled pouring off the clear portion.

D. C. B.—A beautiful complexion is chiefly dependent on perfection of health, and that desirable condition attaches to a full circulation of the blood, unimpeded digestion, frequent bath with habits of regular outdoor exercise, a diversion of the mind by a happy mixture of daily duties and recreation, with the possession of a few of animal spirits, which leads the possessor to be at peace with himself and all the world.

LADYBIRD.—Try and draw your guests out. Everyone can do something to add to the social life of the table. If one cannot talk he can listen or ask questions, and draw out others who can talk. Never argue at the table, but tell pleasant stories, relate or read anecdotes, and look out for the good of all. Sometimes a single anecdote from a paper starts a conversation that lasts during mealtime.

MINNIE M.—There is such an infinite variety in the pretty things now made by ladies that we can only endeavour to give you an idea of the materials required. Table-covers, mantel and bracket lamp-brights, screens, and the centres for tidies are made of cloth, serge, and flannel, and while they may be bought already stamped with a design for embroidering, artistic talent and taste as well as art-needlework may be displayed in the designing of the pattern.

E. E. R.—There are many remedies which prove serviceable in certain cases, but we know of no medicine which we can recommend as a cure for consumption. Measures relating to hygienic influence, diet, and climate are of much greater importance than medicine. Consumption is a disease of the lungs, deriving its name from the consuming effect upon the lungs, and the wasting of the entire body. This disease prevails to a greater or less extent in all portions of the world.

G. G. P.—How do you like the following for your young friend's album:—

"The names of those you prize and love,
When steadfast friendship makes them dear—
Companions of your happier hours—
Let such alone be gathered here;
And when you turn these treasured leaves,
And see what loved ones here have traced,
Let him who penned these careless lines
From memory be not quite effaced."

LOVELL.—1. Richard Brinsley Sheridan was an English dramatist and politician, born in Dublin in 1751, died in London in 1816. *The Rivals* was brought out at Covent Garden, and became a universal favourite. It was followed by the farce of *St. Patrick's Day*; or, the *Shining Lieutenant*, and the comic opera of *The Duenna*. In 1777 he brought out *The School for Scandal*, which placed him at the head of comic dramatists. 2. The word "kismet" signifies fate, destiny.

DOMINUS.—A polypos in the nose is indicated by a constant stuffed feeling as from a cold in the head. Their extent varies according to their time and freedom of growth. It may generally be brought to view by forcing air through the affected nostril while the other is closed, and there sometimes proves to be more than one. The most satisfactory mode of treatment consists in their removal, which may be effected in various ways according to their position, either by forceps or ligature. If allowed to remain the increasing size blocks up the nostril, impairing taste and smell, and producing deformity of the cheek and about the eye.

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††† We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

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